

Insurrection is the autonomous action of the working class and during insurrection the working class materialize their desires. *Now* we must materialize our future today.

Lenin, Debord, Newton,
Aufheben, Broadus & Young

Introduction to Insurrection in America, '65 - '92

A Collection of Autonomous Resistance,
Critical Analysis, and Radical Poetry



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NEGATECIT(Y) COUNTERFEIT SERIES

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Listen to the shots from my nigga Doggy Dogg,
biddy-bye
Dr. Dre, him bust gun shots
Diggity Daz and RBX, dem bust gun shots
Come again!

-Calvin Broadus & Andre Young

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¹Negate City doesn't endorse the reckless use of words; we recognize that many have a pedigree of violence and hate. The editors weren't around for the riots. We are college-educated White folks. We included these lyrics as a coda to the collection in order to highlight the dangerous countercultural energy they engendered in some of us when we were younger, and to express our gratitude for and appreciation of that energy.



I said how many n*ggaz are ready to loot?
"Got myself an Uzi and my brother a 9!"
I got my finger on the trigger so n*ggaz wonder why
But livin in the city it's do-or-die

One-Time trigger happy, no n*gga love
One-eighty-seven time, time to grab the glove
Can't get prints on a nine I throw away
Or get prints on my Uzi when it spray
Pop, pop, pop: another motherfucker drop
And I get relief like, "*plop plop fizz*"
Smash, I crashed his head like a window
I ain't Nintendo, I'm high off the indo
Creepin, with the quickness, to the cut
Bust, one to his head, while he munches on a donut
And crack-up, so now he best to back up
I guess I gots to pack up, filling, the clip up
I zip up-town, but motherfuckin cops are all around
Helicopters flyin, these motherfuckers tryin
To catch me and stretch me on Death Row
But hell no, suppose black refuse to go?

"Break'em off somethin"

The outcome of this is destruction, so them all fall
N*ggaz don't give a fuck, so them bust and them fall
The, description of three blacks
Shows no justice, so, pick up it's your right
If you riot again, me, turn the other cheek
We, be too many, me got, me nine to my side
So me bust, flick, cause he don't give a fuck
And me don't give a fuck
And all my problems end with that *buck buck*

Blak blam, blam til dem fall

Yeah, so what you wanna do?
What you wanna do?
I said how many n*ggaz are ready to loot?
“Got myself an Uzi and my brother a 9!”

That's what they told us today
In other words, you still a slave
No matter how much money you got, you still ain't shit

Sittin in my living room, calm and collected
Feelin that gotta-get-mine perspective
Cause what I just heard, broke me in half
And half the n*ggaz I know,
Plus the n*ggaz on the Row is bailin
Laugh now but cry much later
Ya see when n*ggaz get together
They get mad cause they can't fade us
Like my n*ggaz from South Central, Los Angeles
They found that they couldn't handle us
Bloods, Crips on the same squad
With the Ese's help and n*gga it's time to rob and mob
(And break the white man off somthin lovely,
biddy-bye-bye, I don't love dem so dem can't love me)
Yo, straight puttin it down gettin my scooter on
It's jump in off in Compton so I gots to get my loot on
And come up on me some furniture or somethin
Got a VCR, in the back of my car
That I ganked from the Slausson Swap Meet
And motherfuckers better not try to stop me
Cause they will see that I can't be stopped
Cause I'ma cock my Glock and pop til they all drop

How many n*ggaz are ready to loot?
Yeah, so what you wanna do?
What you wanna do?



Part V.

THE DAY THE N*GGAZ TOOK OVER

I'ma say this and I'ma end mine
If you ain't down, for the Africans here
In the United States, period point blank
If you ain't down for the ones that suffered in South Africa from
apartheid and shit
Devil you need to step your punk ass to the side
And let us brothers, and us Africans, step in
And start puttin some *foot* in that ass!

"Break 'em off somethin"

I got my finger on the trigger so n*ggaz wonder why
But livin in the city it's do-or-die

Dem wonder why me violent and no really understand
For de reason why me take me law, in me own, hand
Me not out for peace and me not Rodney King
De gun goes - click, me gun goes - bang
Dem riot in Compton and dem riot in Long Beach
Dem riot in L.A. cause dem no really wanna see
N*ggaz start to loot and police start to shoot
Lock us down at seven o'clock, barricades us like Beirut
Me don't show no love cause it's us against dem
Dem never ever love me cause it's sport to break dem
And kill, at my own risk, if I may
To lay, to spray, with my AK, and put it to rest

How many n*ggaz are ready to loot?

For years, American rulers could let the ghetto kill itself. In May '92 its guns were turned on the oppressor. A new wave of struggle has begun.

-Aufheben

Introduction

Negate City Press is excited to present this collection of texts regarding insurrection, working class attitudes, and violence against Capital. As you read, keep asking yourself what the connection is between insurrection and revolution—how are we, you, the working class going to *rise above mere insurrection*? Have fun and don't let Lenin scare you, he is dead.

Part 1.

MARXISM AND INSURRECTION

A Letter to the Central Committee of the RSDLPB (and you).

One of the most vicious and widespread distortions of Marxism resorted to by the dominant "socialist" parties is the opportunist lie that preparation for insurrection, and generally the treatment of insurrection as an art, is "Blanquism."

Bernstein, the leader of opportunism, has already earned himself unfortunate fame by accusing Marxism of Blanquism, and when our present-day opportunists cry Blanquism they do not improve on or "enrich" the meagre "ideas" of Bernstein one little bit.

Marxists are accused of Blanquism for treating insurrection as an art! Can there be a more flagrant perversion of the truth, when not a single Marxist will deny that it was Marx who expressed himself on this score in the most definite, precise and categorical manner, referring to insurrection specifically as an art, saying that it must be treated as an art, that you must win the first success and then proceed from success to success, never ceasing the *offensive* against the enemy, taking advantage of his confusion, etc., etc.?

To be successful, insurrection must rely not upon conspiracy and not upon a party, but upon the advanced class. That is the first point. Insurrection must rely upon a *revolutionary upsurge of the people*. That is the second point. Insurrection must rely upon that turning-point in the history of the growing revolution when the activity of the advanced

below focussing on people's needs and rejecting the mediation of the existing political system. For [working-class] Blacks, a leap is required, but it will not happen through some "battle of ideas" with the black nationalists carried out in the abstract, but only in connection with practice; only by and through struggle will the [working-class] Blacks of L.A. and the rest of the American proletariat develop a need for communism to which the direct appropriation of goods showed the way.

"In one crowded apartment building 75% of the tenants were found to possess looted goods and were swapping goods among themselves." LAPD Lieutenant Rick Morton (*International Herald Tribune*, May 8th 1992.)

We might say the proletariat only sets itself the problems it can solve. Only by and through a new round of struggles such as began in L.A. will there be the opening for the American working class to find the ideas and organizational forms that it needs.

CONCLUSION

"Let us please not go back to normal." Distressed caller on radio talk show during the riots. (Understanding the Riots, *LA Times book*, 1992.)

The rebellion in Los Angeles marked a leap forward in the global class struggle. In direct appropriation and as an offensive against the sites of capitalist exploitation, the whole of the population of South Central felt its power. There is a need to go on. The struggle has politicised the population. The truce is fundamental—the proletariat has to stop killing itself. The LAPD is worried and are surely now considering the sort of measures they used to break the gang unity that followed the Watts rebellion. The police are scared by the truce and by the wave of politicisation which may follow it. That politicization will have to go beyond Black nationalism and the incorporative leanings of the gang leadership—another leap is required. In the multi-ethnic nature of the uprising and the solidarity actions across the country, we saw signs that the proletariat can take this leap.

BLACK NATIONALISM

The limitations of the practical proposals of the gang leaders are partly a result of their conflict of interest with the ordinary members but also a function of the limits of their ideology. The gangs' political ideas are trapped within the limits of black nationalism. But how should we view this when their practice is so obviously beyond their theory? After all, as someone once observed, one doesn't judge the proletariat by what this or that proletarian thinks but by what it is necessary impelled to do by its historical situation. The gangs took seriously Public Enemy's Farrakhan-influenced stance on non-Black businesses and "shut 'em down". Although Farrakhan does not preach violence as a political means many in the Black gangs agree with his goal of Black economic self-determination and saw the violence as a means towards that goal. In reality this goal of a "Black capitalism" is wrong but the means they chose were right. The tendency of separation and antagonism shown by the rebellion is absolutely correct but it needs to be an antagonism and separation from capital rather than from non-Black society. It is necessary that as the marginalized sector rediscovers the organisation and political ideas that were repressed in the 1960s and 1970s that it goes beyond those positions.

But, just as blacks were not the only or even the majority of rioters, the Crips and Bloods are not the only gangs. Chinese, Filipinos, Vietnamese, Salvadorans and most other Latin American immigrants have all evolved the gang as an organizational form for youth. Now, just as these gangs are far less involved in the international side of the drug business—selling indigenous drugs such as marijuana, PCP and speed at much smaller profit—they also do not have the nationalist leanings of the Black gangs. Before the rebellion, a level of communication was reached between Black and Latino youth through the shared culture of rap music and the experience it expresses. The tentative alliance between Blacks and Latinos that emerged during the uprising shows a way forward. Los Angeles and Am-erica generally does need a rainbow coalition, but not one putting faith in Jesse Jackson; rather, one from

ranks of the people is at its height, and when the vacillations in the ranks of the enemy and *in the ranks of the weak, half-hearted and irresolute friends of the revolution* are strongest. That is the third point. And these three conditions for raising the question of insurrection distinguish *Marxism from Blanquism*.

Once these conditions exist, however, to refuse to treat insurrection as an art is a betrayal of Marxism and a betrayal of the revolution.

To show that it is precisely the present moment that the Party *must* recognise as the one in which the entire course of events has objectively placed *insurrection* on the order of the day and that insurrection must be treated as an art, it will perhaps be best to use the method of comparison, and to draw a parallel between July 3-4 and the September days.

On July 3-4 it could have been argued, without violating the truth, that the correct thing to do was to take power, for our enemies would in any case have accused us of insurrection and ruthlessly treated us as rebels. However, to have decided on this account in favour of taking power at that time would have been wrong, because the objective conditions for the victory of the insurrection did not exist.

(1) We still lacked the support of the class which is the vanguard of the revolution. We still did not have a majority among the workers and soldiers of Petrograd and Moscow. Now we have a majority in both Soviets. It was created *solely* by the history of July and August, by the experience of the "ruthless treatment" meted out to the Bolsheviks, and by the experience of the Kornilov Revolt.

(2) There was no country-wide revolutionary upsurge at that time. There is now, after the Kornilov Revolt; the situation in the provinces and assumption of power by the Soviets in many localities prove this.

(3) At that time there was no *vacillation* on any serious political scale among our enemies and among the irresolute petty bourgeoisie. Now the vacillation is enormous. Our main enemy, Allied and world imperialism (for world imperialism is headed by the "Allies"), *has begun to waver* between a war to a victorious finish and a separate

peace directed against Russia. Our petty-bourgeois democrats, having clearly lost their majority among the people, have begun to vacillate enormously, and have rejected a bloc, i.e., a coalition, with the Cadets.

(4) Therefore, an insurrection on July 3-4 would have been a mistake; we could not have retained power either physically or politically. We could not have retained it physically even though Petrograd was at times in our hands, because at that time our workers and soldiers would not have *fought and died* for Petrograd. There was not at the time that "savageness", or fierce hatred *both of* the Kerenskys *and of* the Tseretelis and Chernovs. Our people had still not been tempered by the experience of the persecution of the Bolsheviks in which the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks participated.

We could not have retained power politically on July 3-4 because, *before the Kornilov Revolt*, the army and the provinces could and would have marched against Petrograd.

Now the picture is entirely different.

We have the following of the majority of a class, the vanguard of the revolution, the vanguard of the people, which is capable of carrying the masses with it.

We have the following of the *majority* of the people, because Chernov's resignation, while by no means the only symptom, is the most striking and obvious symptom that the peasants *will not receive land* from the Socialist-Revolutionaries' bloc (or from the Socialist-Revolutionaries themselves). And that is the chief reason for the popular character of the revolution.

We are in the advantageous position of a party that knows for certain which way to go at a time when *imperialism, as a whole* and the Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary bloc as a whole are vacillating in an incredible fashion.

Our victory is assured, for the people are close to desperation, and we are showing the entire people a sure way out; we demonstrated to the entire people during the "Kornilov days" the value of our leadership, and then proposed to the politicians of the bloc a compromise, *which they rejected*, although there is no let-up in their vacillations.

It would be a great mistake to think that our offer of a

ghetto might insert themselves into that section, the attractive security of that section is founded on an overall recomposition of the proletariat that necessarily posits the existence of the marginalized "underclass".

But, leaving aside the change in the conditions which makes large scale investment in the inner cities very unlikely, what do the gang leaders proposals amount to? Faced with the re-allocation of South Central residents as unguaranteed excluded objects within capital's plan of development, the gang leaders present themselves as negotiators of a new deal: they seek to present the rebellion as a \$1 billion warning to American capital/state that it must bring these subjects into the fold with the gang leaders as mediators. They are saying that they accept the reduction of life to Work-Wage-Consumption, but that there is not enough work (!) i.e. they want the proletariat's refusal of mediation—its direct meeting of its needs—to force capital to re-insert them into the normal capitalist mediation of needs through work and the wage. The gangs, with their labor-intensive drug industry, have been operating a crypto-Keynesian employment programme; now in their plans for urban renewal the gang leadership want fully-fledged Keynesianism, with them instead of the unions as the brokers of labor-power. But, even apart from the fact that capital will not be able to deliver what the gang leaders seek, the rebellion has shown the whole American proletariat a different way of realising its needs; by collective direct action they can take back what's theirs.

These demands show the similarity of gang and union leadership: how they both act to limit the aspirations of their members to what can be met within the capitalist order. But for all the negative aspects to the union/gang organization, we must recognise that they do originate from real needs of the proletariat: the needs for solidarity, collective defense and a sense of belongingness felt by the atomised proletarian subject. Moreover the gangs are closer to this point of origin than the sclerotic unions of advanced capitalist countries. The gang is not the form of organization for Blacks or other groups, but it is a form of organization that exists, that has shown itself prepared to engage in class struggle and that has had in the past and now it seems again to have the potential for radicalizing itself into a real threat to capital.

Since the rebellion, some attention has been given to the political ideas and proposals of the gangs (or, more precisely, the gang leadership). The proposals are mixed. Some are unobjectionable, like that for gang members with video cameras to follow the police to prevent brutality and for money for locally community controlled rebuilding of the neighbourhood; but others, like replacing welfare with workfare, and for close cooperation between the gangs and corporations, are more dubious. The political ideas from which these proposals spring seem largely limited to black nationalism. So how should we understand these proposals and this ideology?

The attempt by the gang leadership to interpose themselves as mediators of the ghetto has similarities to the role of unions and we should perhaps apply to them a similar critique to that which we apply to unions. It is necessary 1: to recognise a difference between the leaders and the ordinary members and 2: to recognise the role of the leadership as recuperating and channelling the demands of the rank and file.

Some of the gang leaders' conceptions are, quite apart from being reactionary, manifestly unrealistic. In the context of capitalist restructuring, the inner city ghetto and its "underclass" is surplus to requirements—it has been written off—it has no place in capitalist strategy, except perhaps as a terror to encourage the others. It is extremely unlikely that there will be a renegotiation of the social contract to bring these subjects back into the main rhythm of capitalist development. This was to an extent possible in the 1960s and 1970s, but no longer.

Understandably, in the light of the main options available, there is a desire in the inhabitants of L.A. for secure unionized employment. But capital has moved many industries away and they will not come back. Many of the people in these areas recognise the change and want jobs in computers and other areas of the new industries. But, although individual people from the ghetto may manage to get a job in these sectors (probably only by moving), for the vast majority this will remain a dream. Within capital's restructuring, these jobs are available to a certain section of the working class, and, while a few from the

compromise had not yet been rejected, and that the Democratic Conference may *still* accept it. The compromise was proposed *by a party to parties*; it could not have been proposed in any other way. It was rejected by parties. The Democratic Conference is a *conference*, and nothing more. One thing must not be forgotten, namely, that the majority of the revolutionary people, the poor, embittered peasants, are not represented in it. It is a conference of *a minority of the people*—this obvious truth must not be forgotten. It would be a big mistake, sheer parliamentary cretinism on our part, if we were to regard the Democratic Conference as a parliament; for even if it were to proclaim itself a permanent and sovereign parliament of the revolution, it would nevertheless *decide nothing*. The power of decision lies *outside* it in the working-class quarters of Petrograd and Moscow.

All the objective conditions exist for a successful insurrection. We have the exceptional advantage of a situation in which only our victory in the insurrection can put an end to that most painful thing on earth, vacillation, which has worn the people out; in which only our victory in the insurrection will give the peasants land immediately; a situation in which only our victory in the insurrection can *foil* the game of a separate peace directed against the revolution—foil it by publicly proposing a fuller, juster and earlier peace, a peace that will *benefit* the revolution.

Finally, our Party alone can, by a victorious insurrection, save Petrograd; for if our proposal for peace is rejected, if we do not secure even an armistice, then we shall become "defencists", we shall place ourselves at *the head of the war parties*, we shall be the *war party par excellence*, and we shall conduct the war in a truly revolutionary manner. We shall take away all the bread and boots from the capitalists. We shall leave them only crusts and dress them in bast shoes. We shall send all the bread and footwear to the front.

And then we shall save Petrograd.

The resources, both material and spiritual, for a truly revolutionary war in Russia are still immense; the chances are a hundred to one that the Germans will grant us at least an armistice. And to secure an armistice now would in itself mean to win *the whole world*.

* * *

Having recognised the absolute necessity for an insurrection of the workers of Petrograd and Moscow in order to save the revolution and to save Russia from a "separate" partition by the imperialists of both groups, we must first adapt our political tactics at the Conference to the conditions of the growing insurrection; secondly, we must show that it is not only in words that we accept Marx's idea that insurrection must be treated as an art.

At the Conference we must immediately cement the Bolshevik group, without striving after numbers, and without fearing to leave the waverers in the waverers' camp. They are more useful to the cause of the revolution *there* than in the camp of the resolute and devoted fighters.

We must draw up a brief declaration from the Bolsheviks, emphasising in no uncertain manner the irrelevance of long speeches and of "speeches" in general, the necessity for immediate action to save the revolution, the absolute necessity for a complete break with the bourgeoisie, for the removal of the present government, in its entirety, for a complete rupture with the Anglo-French imperialists, who are preparing a "separate" partition of Russia, and for the immediate transfer of all power to *revolutionary democrats, headed by the revolutionary proletariat*.

Our declaration must give the briefest and most trenchant formulation of this conclusion in connection with the programme proposals of peace for the peoples, land for the peasants, confiscation of scandalous profits, and a check on the scandalous sabotage of production by the capitalists.

The briefer and more trenchant the declaration, the better. Only two other highly important points must be clearly indicated in it, namely, that the people are worn out by the vacillations, that they are fed up with the irresolution of the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks; and that we are definitely breaking with these *parties* because they have betrayed the revolution.

And another thing. By immediately proposing a peace without annexations, by immediately breaking with the Allied imperialists and

profits threatened, it, like any other multinational, diversified and developed new products, the chief one being crack—"the poor man's cocaine." Young proletarians participate in this business because it is the work on offer. *It is not them but capital that reduces life to survival/work*. We can see, then, that selling crack is in a sense just another undesirable activity like making weapons or cigarettes that proletarians are forced to engage in. But there is a significant difference. Within most occupations proletarians can organize directly within and against capital; but the drug dealing gangs do not confront capital as labor. Gangs do not confront the capital of the enterprise, they confront the repressive arm of capital-in-general: the State. In fact, to the extent that the gangs engage in the cocaine trade and fit firmly into the circuit of international capital, they are the capitalist enterprise. This is a problem. The drive-by shootings and lethal turf wars of the Black gangs is the proletariat killing itself for capital.

It is necessary to see, then, that the murderous gangbanging phenomenon which is presently halted has not been, as the bourgeois press would have it, the result of the breakdown of "family values" and the loss of the restraining influence of the middle class as they left for the suburbs; rather it resulted from 1: the economics of capitalist restructuring (the replacing of traditional industries with drugs) and 2: the active destruction of political forms of self-organisation by state repression. The solution to the problem of the murderous crack wars is the rediscovery of political self-activity of the sort shown in the rebellion. The solution to inter-proletarian violence is proletarian violence.

The irrepressible nature of the gang-phenomenon shows the pressing need for organisation on the part of the youth proletariat of L.A. For a while in the 1960s it took a self-consciously political form. When this mani-festly political form of organisation was repressed, the gangs came back with a vengeance, showing that they express a real and pressing need. What we have seen in and since the uprising is a new politicization of gang culture: a return of the repressed.

POLITICAL IDEAS OF THE GANGS

symbol, and so on)...[the Crips] achieved a "managerial revolution" in gang organisation. If they began as a teenage substitute for the fallen Panthers, they evolved through the 1970s into a hybrid of teen cult and proto-mafia".

That gangs, even in their murderous mutation as "proto-mafia" Crips and Bloods, have been an expression of the need for political organisation is indicated in a few instances where they have made political interventions. In two major situations, the Monrovia riots in 1972 and the L.A. schools busing crisis of 1977-79, the Crips intervened in support of the Black community. These gangs, as an expression of the proletariat, are not in the grips of a false consciousness that makes them think all there is to life is gold chains and violence. Whenever they have been given a chance to speak, for instance in December 1972 at the beginning of the transformation of the gangs into the ultra-violent Crips and Bloods, they have come out with clear political demands. Every time they have been given a chance to express themselves, similar demands have been voiced. The LAPD does everything in its power to stop the gangs being given a voice so as to maintain its war against them.

Still, if the gangs wanted to appeal to people's sympathies, they have done themselves no favors by dealing in crack. However, if we look closely at this we find that the mass move into this trade is pushed on them by capital. Young Blacks moved into the alternative economy of drugs when traditional occupations were destroyed. We are dealing with material pressures.

For a member of South Central's youth proletariat, the only rational economic choice is to sell drugs. While the internationalization of the Los Angeles economy has meant a loss for working class Blacks, what the Crips and Bloods have managed to do is insert themselves back into the circuit of international trade. While the international trade in legal commodities decided that the Los Angeles Blacks were expendable another branch found them eminently useful. Southern California has taken over from Florida as the main route of entry of cocaine into the United States. When in the early 80s the cocaine business found the market for its product saturated, its price falling and

with all imperialists, either we shall at once obtain an armistice, or the entire revolutionary proletariat will rally to the defence of the country, and a really just, really revolutionary war will then be waged by revolutionary democrats under the leadership of the proletariat.

Having read this declaration, and having appealed for *decisions* and not talk, for action and not resolution-writing, we must *dispatch* our entire group to the *factories and the barracks*. Their place is there, the pulse of life is there, there's the source of salvation for our revolution, and there is the motive force of the Democratic Conference.

There, in ardent and impassioned speeches, we must explain our programme and put the alternative: either the Conference adopts it *in its entirety*, or else in-surrection. There is no middle course. Delay is impossible. The revolution is lying.

By putting the question in this way, by concentrating our entire group in the factories and barracks, *we shall be able to determine the right moment to start the insurrection*.

In order to treat insurrection in a Marxist way, i.e., as an art, we must at the same time, without losing a single moment, organise a *headquarters* of the insurgent detachments, distribute our forces, move the reliable regiments to the most important points, surround the Alexandriusky Theatre, occupy the Peter and Paul Fortress, arrest the General Staff and the government, and move against the officer cadets and the Savage Division, those detachments which would rather die than allow the enemy to approach the strategic points of the city. We must mobilise the armed workers and call them to fight the last desperate fight, occupy the telegraph and the telephone exchange at once, move our insurrection headquarters to the central telephone exchange and connect it by telephone with all the factories, all the regiments, all the points of armed fighting, etc.

Of course, this is all by way of example, only to illustrate the fact that at the present moment it is impossible to remain loyal to Marxism, to remain loyal to the revolution *unless insurrection is treated as an art*.

—V.I. Lenin

Part 2.

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE SPECTACLE- COMMODITY ECONOMY

August 13-16, 1965, the blacks of Los Angeles revolted. An incident between traffic police and pedestrians developed into two days of spontaneous riots. Despite increasing reinforcements, the forces of order were unable to regain control of the streets. By the third day the Blacks had armed themselves by looting accessible gun stores, enabling them to fire even on police helicopters. It took thousands of police and soldiers, including an entire infantry division, supported by tanks, to confine the riot to the Watts area, and several more days of street fighting to finally bring it under control. Stores were massively plundered and many were burned. Official sources listed 32 dead (including 27 Blacks), more than 800 wounded and 3000 arrests.

Reactions from all sides were most revealing: a revolutionary event, by bringing existing problems into the open, provokes its opponents into an inhabitual lucidity. Police Chief William Parker, for example, rejected all the major Black organizations' offers of mediation, correctly asserting: "These rioters don't have any leaders." Since the blacks no longer had any leaders, it was the moment of truth for both sides. What did one of those unemployed leaders, NAACP general secretary Roy Wilkins, have to say? He declared that the riot "should be put down with all necessary force." And Los Angeles Cardinal McIntyre, who protested loudly, did not protest against the violence of the repression, which one might have supposed the most tactful policy at a time when the Roman Church is modernizing its image; he denounced "this premeditated revolt against the rights of one's neighbor

understand recent gang warfare and the role of gangs in the rebellion we must look at the history of the gang phenomenon.

In Los Angeles, Black street gangs emerged in the late 1940s primarily as a response to White racist attacks in schools and on the streets. When Nation of Islam and other Black nationalist groups formed in the late 1950s, Chief Parker of the LAPD conflated the two phenomena as a combined Black menace. It was a self-fulfilling prophecy, for the repression launched against the gangs and Black militants had the effect of radicalizing the gangs. This politicization reached a peak in the Watts rebellion, when, as in '92, gang members made a truce and were instrumental in the Black working class success in holding off the police for four days. The truce formed in the heat of the rebellion lasted for most of the rest of the 1960s. Many gang members joined the Black Panther Party or formed other radical political groupings. There was a general feeling that the gangs had "joined the Revolution".

The repression of the movement involved the FBI's COINTELPRO program and the LAPD's own red squad. The Panthers were shot on the streets and on the campuses both directly by the police and by their agents, their headquarters in L.A. were besieged by LAPD SWAT teams, and dissension was sown in their ranks. Although the Panthers' politics were flawed, they were an organic expression of the Black proletariat's experience of American capitalism. The systematic nature of their repression shows just how dangerous they were perceived to be.

As even the L.A. Times admitted, the recrudescence of gangs in L.A. in the early 1970s was a direct consequence of the decimation of the more political expressions of Black frustration. A new aspect of this phenomena was the prodigious spread of Crip sets which caused the other gangs to federate as the Bloods. As Davis puts it, "this was not merely a gang revival, but a radical permutation of Black gang culture. The Crips, however perversely, inherited the Panther aura of fearlessness and transmitted the ideology of armed vanguardism (shorn of its program). But too often Crippin' came to represent an escalation of intraghetto violence to Clockwork Orange levels (murder as a status

allow themselves to be captivated by capital's dialectic, by its creation of our dystopia, could fall into mirroring the postmodernists' celebration of it. There is no need for pessimism—what the rebellion showed was that capital has not killed the crowd. Space is still contested. Just as Haussman's plans did not stop the Paris Commune, L.A. redevelopment did not stop the 1992 rebellion.

GANGS

"In June 1988 the police easily won Police Commission approval for the issuing of flesh-ripping hollow-point ammunition: precisely the same 'dum-dum' bullets banned in warfare by the Geneva Conventions." (Mike Davis, 1990, *City of Quartz*, p. 290.)

We cannot deny the role gangs played in the uprising. The systematic nature of the rioting is directly linked to their participation and most importantly to the truce on internal fighting they called before the uprising. Gang members often took the lead which the rest of the proletariat followed. The militancy of the gangs—their hatred of the police—flows from the unprecedented repression the youth of South Central have experienced: a level of state repression on a par with that dished out to rebellious natives by colonial forces such as that suffered by Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. Under the guise of gang-busting and deal-ing with the "crack menace", the LAPD have launched massive "swamp" operations; they have formed files on much of the youth of South Central and murdered lots of proletarians.

As Mike Davis put it in 1988, "the contemporary Gang scare has become an imaginary class relationship, a terrain of pseudo-knowledge and fantasy projection, a talisman." The "gang threat" has been used as an excuse to criminalise the youth of South Central L.A. We should not deny the existence of the problems of crack use and inter-gang violence, but we need to see that, what has actually been a massive case of working class on working class violence, a sorry example of internalised aggression resulting from a position of frustrated needs, has been interpreted as a "lawless threat" to justify more of the repression and oppression that created the situation in the first place. To

and against respect for law and order," calling on Catholics to oppose the looting and "this violence without any apparent justification." And all those who went so far as to recognize the "apparent justifications" of the rage of the Los Angeles Blacks (but never the real ones), all the ideologists and "spokesmen" of the vacuous international Left, deplored the irresponsibility, the disorder, the looting (especially the fact that arms and alcohol were the first targets) and the 2000 fires with which the Blacks lit up their battle and their ball. But who has defended the Los Angeles rioters in the terms they deserve?

We will. Let the economists fret over the \$27 million lost, and the city planners sigh over one of their most beautiful supermarkets gone up in smoke, and McIntyre blubber over his slain deputy sheriff. Let the sociologists bemoan the absurdity and intoxication of this rebellion. The role of a revolutionary publication is not only to justify the Los Angeles insurgents, but to help elucidate their perspectives, to explain theoretically the truth for which such practical action expresses the search.

In Algiers in July 1965, following Boumédiène's *coup d'état*, the situationists issued an Address to the Algerians and to revolutionaries all over the world which interpreted conditions in Algeria and the rest of the world as a whole. Among other examples we mentioned the movement of the American Blacks, stating that if it could "assert itself incisively" it would unmask the contradictions of the most advanced capitalist system. Five weeks later this incisiveness was in the streets. Modern theoretical criticism of modern society and criticism in acts of the same society already coexist; still separated but both advancing toward the same realities, both talking about the same thing. These two critiques are mutually explanatory, and neither can be understood without the other. Our theory of "survival" and of "the spectacle" is illuminated and verified by these actions which are so incomprehensible to American false consciousness. One day these actions will in turn be illuminated by this theory.

Until the Watts explosion, Black civil rights demonstrations had been kept by their leaders within the limits of a legal system that tolerates the most appalling violence on the part of the police and the

racists—as in last March's march on Montgomery, Alabama. Even after the latter scandal, a discreet agreement between the federal government, Governor Wallace and Martin Luther King led the Selma marchers on March 10 to stand back at the first police warning, in dignity and prayer. The confrontation expected by the demonstrators was reduced to a mere spectacle of a potential confrontation. In that moment nonviolence reached the pitiful limit of its courage: *first you expose yourself to the enemy's blows, then you push your moral nobility to the point of sparing him the trouble of using any more force*. But the main point is that the civil rights movement only addressed legal problems by legal means. It is logical to make legal appeals regarding legal questions. What is irrational is to appeal legally against a blatant illegality as if it was a mere oversight that would be corrected if pointed out. It is obvious that the crude and glaring illegality from which Blacks still suffer in many American states has its roots in a socioeconomic contradiction that is not within the scope of existing laws, and that no future judicial law will be able to get rid of this contradiction in the face of the more fundamental laws of this society. What American Blacks are really daring to demand is the right to really live, and in the final analysis *this requires nothing less than the total subversion of this society*. This becomes increasingly evident as Blacks in their everyday lives find themselves forced to use increasingly subversive methods. The issue is no longer the condition of American Blacks, but the condition of America, which merely happens to find its first expression among the Blacks. The Watts riot was not a racial conflict: the rioters left alone the Whites who were in their path, attacking only the white policemen, while on the other hand black solidarity did not extend to Black storeowners or even to Black car-drivers. Martin Luther King himself had to admit that the revolt went beyond the limits of his specialty. Speaking in Paris last October, he said: "This was not a race riot. It was a class riot."

The Los Angeles rebellion was a rebellion against the commodity, against the world of the commodity in which worker-consumers are hierarchically subordinated to commodity standards. Like the young delinquents of all the advanced countries, but more radically because

an unprecedented tendency to merge urban design, architecture and the police apparatus in a single comprehensive security effort." (Davis, *City of Quartz*, p. 224) Just as Haussman redesigned Paris after the revolutions of 1848, building boulevards to give clear lines of fire, L.A. architects and city planners have remade L.A. since the Watts rebellion. Public space is closed, the attempt is made to kill the street as a means of killing the crowd. Such a strategy is not unique to Los Angeles, but here it has reached absurd levels: the police are so desperate to "kill the crowd" that they have taken the unprecedented step of killing the toilet. Around office developments "public" art buildings and landscaped garden "microparks" are designed into the parking structures to allow office workers to move from car to office or shop without being exposed to the dangers of the street. The public spaces that remain are militarized, from "bum-proof" bus shelter benches to automatic sprinklers in the parks to stop people sleeping there. White middle class areas are surrounded by walls and private security. During the riots, the residents of these enclaves either fled or armed themselves and nervously waited.

We see, then, that in the States, but especially in L.A., architecture is not merely a question of aesthetics, *it is used along with the police to separate the included and the excluded sections of capitalist society*. But this phenomenon is by no means unique to America. Across the advanced capitalist countries we see attempts to redevelop urban areas that have been sites of contestation. In Paris, for example, we have seen, under the flag of "culture", the Pompidou centre built on a old working class area, as a celebration of the defeat of the '68 movement. Here in Britain the whole of Docklands was taken over by a private development corporation to redevelop the area—for a while yuppie flats sprang up at ridiculous prices and the long-standing residents felt besieged in their estates by armies of private security guards. Still, we saw how that ended... Now in Germany, the urban areas previously marginalized by the Wall, such as Kreuzberg and the Potsdamer Platz, have become battlegrounds over who's needs the new Berlin will satisfy.

Of course, such observations and criticisms of the "bad edge of postmodernity", if they fail to see the antagonism to the process and

postmodernist, post-structuralist scum have all visited and performed in the city. Baudrillard even found here "utopia achieved."

The "postmodern" celebrators of capitalism love the architecture of Los Angeles, its endless freeways and the redeveloped downtown. They write eulogies to the sublime space within the \$200 a night Bonaventura hotel, but miss the destruction of public space outside. The postmodernists, though happy to extend a term from architecture to the whole of society, and even the epoch, are reluctant to extend their analysis of the architecture just an inch beneath the surface. The "postmodern" buildings of Los Angeles have been built with an influx of mainly Japanese capital into the city. Downtown L.A. is now second only to Tokyo as a financial center for the Pacific Rim. But the redevelopment has been at the expense of the residents of the inner city. Tom Bradley, an ex-cop and Mayor since 1975, has been a perfect Black figurehead for capital's restructuring of L.A.. He has supported the massive redevelopment of downtown L.A., which has been exclusively for the benefit of business. In 1987, at the request of the Central City East Association of Businesses, he ordered the destruction of the makeshift pavement camps of the homeless; there are an estimated 50,000 homeless in L.A., 10,000 of them children. Elsewhere, city planning has involved the destruction of people's homes and of working class work opportunities to make way for business development funded by Pacific Rim capital—a siege by international capital of working class Los Angeles.

But the postmodernists did not even have to look at this behind-the-scenes movement, for the violent nature of the development is apparent from a look at the constructions themselves. The architecture of Los Angeles is characterised by militarization. City planning in Los Angeles is essentially a matter for the police. An overwhelming feature of the L.A. environment is the presence of security barriers, surveillance technology—the policing of space. Buildings in public use like the inner-city malls and a public library are built like fortresses, surrounded by giant security walls and dotted with surveillance cameras.

In Los Angeles, "on the bad edge of postmodernity, one observes

they are part of a class without a future, a sector of the proletariat unable to believe in any significant chance of integration or promotion, the Los Angeles blacks take modern capitalist propaganda, its publicity of abundance, literally. They want to possess now all the objects shown and abstractly accessible, because they want to use them. In this way they are challenging their exchange-value, the commodity reality which molds them and marshals them to its own ends, and which has preselected everything. *Through theft and gift they rediscover a use that immediately refutes the oppressive rationality of the commodity, revealing its relations and even its production to be arbitrary and unnecessary.* The looting of the Watts district was the most direct realization of the distorted principle: "To each according to their false needs"—needs determined and produced by the economic system which the very act of looting rejects. But once the vaunted abundance is taken at face value and directly seized, instead of being eternally pursued in the rat-race of alienated labor and increasing unmet social needs, real desires begin to be expressed in festive celebration, in playful self-assertion, in the potlatch of destruction. *People who destroy commodities show their human superiority over commodities.* They stop submitting to the arbitrary forms that distortedly reflect their real needs. The flames of Watts consummated the system of consumption. The theft of large refrigerators by people with no electricity, or with their electricity cut off, is the best image of the lie of affluence transformed into a truth in play. Once it is no longer bought, the commodity lies open to criticism and alteration, whatever particular form it may take. Only when it is paid for with money is it respected as an admirable fetish, as a symbol of status within the world of survival.

Looting is a natural response to the unnatural and inhuman society of commodity abundance. It instantly undermines the commodity as such, and it also exposes what the commodity ultimately implies: the army, the police and the other specialized detachments of the state's monopoly of armed violence. What is a police-man? *He is the active servant of the commodity*, the man in complete submission to the commodity, whose job is to ensure that a given product of human labor remains a commodity, with the magical property of having to be paid

for, instead of becoming a mere refrigerator or rifle—a passive, inanimate object, subject to anyone who comes along to make use of it. In rejecting the humiliation of being subject to police, the blacks are at the same time rejecting the humiliation of being subject to commodities. The Watts youth, having no future in market terms, grasped another quality of the present, and that quality was so incontestable and irresistible that it drew in the whole population—women, children, and even sociologists who happened to be on the scene. Bobbi Hollon, a young Black sociologist of the neighborhood, had this to say to the Herald Tribune in October: “Before, people were ashamed to say they came from Watts. They’d mumble it. Now they say it with pride. Boys who used to go around with their shirts open to the waist, and who’d have cut you to pieces in half a second, showed up here every morning at seven o’clock to organize the distribution of food. Of course, it’s no use pretending that food wasn’t looted... All that Christian blah has been used too long against Blacks. These people could loot for ten years and they wouldn’t get back half the money those stores have stolen from them over all these years....Me, I’m only a little Black girl.” Bobbi Hollon, who has sworn never to wash off the blood that splashed on her sandals during the rioting, adds: “Now the whole world is watching Watts.”

How do people make history under conditions designed to dissuade them from intervening in it? Los Angeles Blacks are better paid than any others in the United States, but they are also the most separated from the California superopulence that is flaunted all around them. Hollywood, the pole of the global spectacle, is right next door. They are promised that, with patience, they will join in America’s prosperity, but they come to see that this prosperity is not a fixed state but an endless ladder. The higher they climb, the farther they get from the top, because they start off disadvantaged, because they are less qualified and thus more numerous among the unemployed, and finally because the hierarchy that crushes them is not based on economic buying power alone: they are also treated as inherently inferior in every area of daily life by the customs and prejudices of a society in which all human power is based on buying power. Just as the human riches of the

insertion into the Pacific Rim pole of accumulation. Metal banging and transport industry jobs, which blacks only started moving into in the tail end of the boom in late 1960s and the early 1970s, have left the city, while about one million Latino immigrants have arrived, taking jobs in low-wage manufacturing and labor-intensive services. The effect on the Los Angeles Black community has not been homogeneous; while a sizeable section has attained guaranteed status through white-collar jobs in the public sector, the majority who were employed in the private sector in traditional working class jobs have become unemployed. It is working class youth who have fared worse, with unemployment rates of 45% in South Central.

But the recomposition of the L.A. working class has not been entirely a victory of capitalist restructuring. Capital would like this section of society to work. It would like its progressive undermining of the welfare system to make the "underclass" go and search for jobs, any jobs anywhere. Instead, many residents survive by "Aid to Families With Dependent Children", forcing the cost of reproducing labor power on to the state, which is particularly irksome when the labor power produced is so unruly. The present consensus among bourgeois commentators is that the problem is the "decline of the family and its values." Capital's imperative is to reimpose its model of the family as a model of work discipline and form of reproduction (make the proles take on the cost of reproduction themselves).

A NOTE ON ARCHITECTURE AND THE POSTMODERNISTS

Los Angeles, as we know, is the "city of the future". In the 1930s the progressive vision of business interests prevailed and the L.A. streetcars—one of the best public transport systems in America—were ripped up; freeways followed. It was in Los Angeles that Adorno & Horkheimer first painted their melancholy picture of consciousness subsumed by capitalism and where Marcuse later pronounced man "One-Dimensional". More recently, Los Angeles has been the inspiration for fashionable post-theory. Baudrillard, Derrida and other

by 44% between 1973 and 1990, there have been severe cutbacks in social programs and massive disinvestment. With the uprising, the American working class has shown that capital's success in isolating and screwing this section has been temporary.

The re-emergence of an active proletarian subject shows the importance, when considering the strategies of capital, of not forgetting that its restructuring is a response to working class power. The working class is not just an object within capital's process. It is a subject (or plurality of subjects), and, at the level of political class composition reached by the proletariat in the 1960s, it undermined the process. Capital's restructuring was an attack on this class composition, an attempt to transform the subject back into an object, into labor-power.

Capitalist restructuring tried to introduce fragmentation and hierarchy into a class subject which was tending towards unity (a unity that respected multilaterality). It moved production to other parts of the world (only, as in Korea, to export class struggle as well); it tried to break the strength of the "mass worker" by breaking up the labor force within factories into teams and by spreading the factory to lots of small enterprises; it has also turned many wage-laborers into self-employed to make people internalise capital's dictates. In America, the fragmentation also occurred along the lines of ethnicity. Black blue-collar workers have been a driving force in working class militancy as recorded by C.L.R. James and others. For a large number of Blacks and others, the new plan involved their relegation to Third World poverty levels. But as Negri puts it, "marginalization is as far as capital can go in excluding people from the circuits of production—expulsion is impossible. Isolation within the circuit of production—this is the most that capital's action of restructuring can hope to achieve." When recognizing the power of capital's restructuring it is necessary to affirm the fundamental place of working class struggles as the motor force of capital's development. Capital attacks a certain level of political class composition and a new level is recomposed; but this is not the creation of the perfect, pliable working class—it is only ever a provisional recomposition of the class on the basis of its previously attained level.

Capitalist restructuring has taken the form in Los Angeles of its

American Blacks are despised and treated as criminal, mon-etary riches will never make them completely acceptable in America's alienated society: *individual wealth will only make a rich nigger because Blacks as a whole must represent poverty in a society of hierarchized wealth*. Every witness noted the cry proclaiming the global significance of the uprising: "This is a Black revolution and we want the world to know it!" 'Freedom Now' is the password of all the revolutions of history, but now for the first time the problem is not to overcome scarcity, but to master material abundance according to new principles. Mastering abundance is not just changing the way it is shared out, but totally reorienting it. This is the first step of a vast, all-embracing struggle.

The Blacks are not alone in their struggle, because a new proletarian consciousness (the consciousness that they are not at all the masters of their own activities, of their own lives) is developing in America among strata which in their rejection of modern capitalism resemble the Blacks. It was, in fact, the first phase of the Black struggle which happened to be the signal for the more general movement of contestation that is now spreading. In December 1964 the students of Berkeley, harassed for their participation in the civil rights movement, initiated a strike¹ challenging the functioning of California's "multiversity" and ultimately calling into question the entire American social system in which they are being programmed to play such a passive role. The spectacle promptly responded with exposés of widespread student drinking, drug use and sexual immorality—the same activities for which blacks have long been reproached. This generation of students has gone on to invent a new form of struggle against the dominant spectacle, the teach-in, a form taken up October 20 in Great Britain at the University of Edinburgh during the Rhodesian crisis. This obviously primitive and imperfect form represents the stage at which people refuse to confine their discussion of problems within academic limits or fixed time periods; the stage when they strive to pursue issues to their ultimate consequences and are thus led to practical activity. The same month tens of thousands of anti-Vietnam war demonstrators appeared in the streets of Berkeley and New York, their cries echoing

those of the Watts rioters: "Get out of our district and out of Vietnam!" Becoming more radical, many of the whites are finally going outside the law: "courses" are given on how to hoodwink army recruiting boards (Le Monde, 19 October 1965) and draft cards are burned in front of television cameras. In the affluent society disgust is being expressed for this affluence and for its price. The spectacle is being spat on by an advanced sector whose autonomous activity denies its values. The classical proletariat, to the very extent to which it had been provisionally integrated into the capitalist system, had itself failed to integrate the Blacks (several Los Angeles unions refused Blacks until 1959); now the Blacks are the rallying point for all those who refuse the logic of this integration into capitalism, which is all that the promise of racial integration amounts to. Comfort will never be comfortable enough for those who seek what is not on the market, what in fact the market specifically eliminates. The level attained by the technology of the most privileged becomes an insult, and one more easily grasped and resented than is that most fundamental insult: reification. The Los Angeles rebellion is the first in history to justify itself with the argument that there was no air conditioning during a heat wave.

The American Blacks have their own particular spectacle, their own Black newspapers, magazines and stars, and if they are rejecting it in disgust as a fraud and as an expression of their humiliation, it is because they see it as a minority spectacle, a mere appendage of a general spectacle. Recognizing that their own spectacle of desirable consumption is a colony of the White one enables them to see more quickly through the falsehood of the whole economic-cultural spectacle. By wanting to participate really and immediately in the affluence that is the official value of every American, they are really demanding the egalitarian actualization of the American spectacle of everyday life—they are demanding that the half-heavenly, half-earthly values of the spectacle be put to the test. But it is in the nature of the spectacle that it cannot be actualized either immediately or equally, not even for the Whites. (The Blacks in fact function as a perfect spectacular object-lesson: the threat of falling into such wretchedness spurs others on in the rat-race.) In taking the capitalist spectacle at its

their recomposition as marginalized sub-workers excluded from consideration as a part of society by the label "underclass". The material basis for such sociological categorizations is that, on the one hand there is the increased access to "luxury" consumption for certain "higher" strata, while on the other there is the exclusion from anything but "subsistence" consumption by those "lower" strata consigned to unemployment or badly paid part-time or irregular work.

This strategy of capital's carries risks, for while the included sector is generally kept in line by the brute force of economic relations, redoubled by the fear of falling into the excluded sector, the excluded themselves, for whom the American dream has been revealed as a nightmare, must be kept down by sheer police repression. In this repression, the war on drugs has acted as a cover for measures that increasingly contradict the "civil rights" which bourgeois society, especially in America, has prided itself on bringing into the world.

Part of the U.S. capital's response to the Watts and other 1960s rebellions was to give ground. To a large section of the working class revolting because its needs were not being met, capital responded with money—the form of mediation *par excellence*—trying to meet some of that pressure within the limits of capitalist control. This was not maintained into the 1980s. For example, federal aid to cities fell from \$47.2 billion in 1980 to \$21.7 billion in 1992. The pattern is that of the global response to the proletarian offensives of the 1960s and 1970s: first give way—allowing wage increases, increasing welfare spending (i.e. meeting the social needs of the proletariat)—then, when capital has consolidated its forces, the second part—restructure accumulation on a different basis—destructure knots of working class militancy, create unemployment.

In America, this strategy was on the surface more successful than in Europe. The American bourgeoisie had managed to halt the general rise in wages by selectively allowing some sectors of the working class to maintain or increase their living standards while others had their's massively reduced. One sector in particular has felt the brunt of this strategy: the residents of the inner city who are largely Black and Hispanic. The average yearly income of Black high school graduates fell

the Koreans came to represent capital to Blacks. However, these racial divisions are totally contingent. Within the overall restructuring, the jobs removed from L.A. Blacks were relocated to other parts of the Pacific Rim such as South Korea. The combativity of these South Korean workers shows that the petty-bourgeois role Koreans take in L.A. is but part of a wider picture in which class conflict crosses all national and ethnic divides as global finance capital dances around trying to escape its nemesis but always recreating it.

CLASS COMPOSITION AND CAPITALIST RESTRUCTURING

The American working class is divided between waged and unwaged, blue and white collar, immigrant and citizen labor, guaranteed and unguaranteed; but as well as this, and often synonymous with these distinctions, it is divided along ethnic lines. Moreover, these divisions are real divisions in terms of power and expectations. We cannot just cover them up with a call for class unity or fatalistically believe that, until the class is united behind a Leninist party or other such vanguard, it will not be able to take on capital. In terms of the American situation as well as with other areas of the global class conflict it is necessary to use the dynamic notion of class composition rather than a static notion of social classes.

"When Bush visited the area security was massive. TV networks were asked not to broadcast any of Mr Bush's visit live to keep from giving away his exact location in the area." (*International Herald Tribune*, May 8th, 1992.)

The rebellion in South Central Los Angeles and the associated actions across the United States showed the presence of an antagonistic proletarian subject within American capitalism. This presence had been occluded by a double process: on the one hand, a sizeable section of American workers have had their consciousness of being proletarian—of being in antagonism to capital—obscured in a widespread identification with the idea of being "middle-class"; and on the other, for a sizeable minority, perhaps a quarter of the population, there has being

face value, the Blacks are already rejecting the spectacle itself. The spectacle is a drug for slaves. It is designed not to be taken literally, but to be followed from just out of reach; when this separation is eliminated, the hoax is revealed. In the United States today the whites are enslaved to the commodity while the Blacks are negating it. The Blacks are asking for more than the Whites—this is the core of a problem that has no solution except the dissolution of the White social system. This is why those Whites who want to escape their own slavery must first of all rally to the Black revolt—not, obviously, in racial solidarity, but in a joint global rejection of the commodity and of the state. The economic and psychological distance between Blacks and Whites enables Blacks to see white consumers for what they are, and their justified contempt for Whites develops into a contempt for passive consumers in general. The Whites who reject this role have no chance unless they link their struggle more and more to that of the Blacks, uncovering its most fundamental implications and supporting them all the way. If, with the radicalization of the struggle, such a convergence is not achieved, Black nationalist tendencies will be rein-forced, leading to the futile interethnic antagonism so characteristic of the old society. Mutual slaughter is the other possible outcome of the present situation, once resignation is no longer viable.

The attempts to build a separatist or pro-African Black nationalism are dreams giving no answer to the real oppression. The American Blacks have no fatherland. *They are in their own country and they are alienated.* So are the rest of the population, but the Blacks are aware of it. In this sense they are not the most backward sector of American society, but the most advanced. They are the negation at work, "the bad side that makes history by provoking struggles" (The Poverty of Philosophy). Africa has no special monopoly on that.

The American Blacks are a product of modern industry, just like electronics or advertising or the cyclotron. And they embody its contradictions. They are the people whom the spectacle paradise must simultaneously integrate and reject, with the result that the antagonism between the spectacle and human activity is totally revealed through them. The spectacle is universal, it pervades the globe just as the

commodity does. But since the world of the commodity is based on class conflict, the commodity itself is hierarchical. The necessity for the commodity (and hence for the spectacle, whose role is to inform the commodity world) to be both universal and hierarchical leads to a universal hierarchization. But because this hierarchization must remain unavowed, it is expressed in the form of unavowable, because irrational, hierarchical value judgments in a world of irrational rationalization. It is this hierarchization that creates racisms everywhere. The British Labour government has come to the point of restricting nonwhite immigration, while the industrially advanced countries of Europe are once again becoming racist as they import their subproletariat from the Mediterranean area, developing a colonial exploitation within their own borders. And if Russia continues to be anti-Semitic it is because it continues to be a hierarchical society in which labor must be bought and sold as a commodity. The commodity is constantly extending its domain and engendering new forms of hierarchy, whether between labor leader and worker or between two car-owners with artificially distinguished models. This is the original flaw in commodity rationality, the sickness of bourgeois reason, a sickness which has been inherited by the bureaucratic class. But the repulsive absurdity of certain hierarchies, and the fact that the entire commodity world is directed blindly and automatically to their protection, leads people to see—the moment they engage in a negating practice—that *every hierarchy is absurd*.

The rational world produced by the Industrial Revolution has rationally liberated individuals from their local and national limitations and linked them on a global scale; but it irrationally separates them once again, in accordance with a hidden logic that finds its expression in insane ideas and grotesque values. Estranged from their own world, people are everywhere surrounded by strangers. The barbarians are no longer at the ends of the earth, they are among the general population, made into barbarians by their forced participation in the worldwide system of hierarchical consumption. The veneer of humanism that camouflages all this is inhuman, it is the negation of human activities and desires; it is the humanism of the commodity, the solicitous care of

the overwhelming extent to which this was not the case, the extent to which the insurgents bypassed capital's racist strategies of control.

"A lot of people feel that in order to come together we have to sacrifice the neighborhood." Will M., former gang member, on the destruction of businesses. (*Inter-national Herald Tribune*, May 8th, 1992.)

One form the rebellion took was a systematic assault on Korean businesses. The Koreans are on the frontline of the confrontation between capital and the residents of central L.A.—they are the face of capital for these communities. Relations between the Black community and the Koreans had collapsed following the Harlins incident and its judicial result. In an argument over a \$1.79 bottle of orange juice, Latasha Harlins, a 15-year-old Black girl, was shot in the back of the head by a Korean grocer—Soon Ja Du—who was then let off with a \$500 fine and some community service. While the American State packs its Gulags with poor Blacks for just trying to survive, it allows a shopkeeper to kill their children. But though this event had a strong effect on the Blacks of South Central, their attack on Korean property cannot be reduced to vengeance for one incident—it was directed against the whole system of exchange. The uprising attacked capital in its form of property, not any property but the property of businesses—the institutions of exploitation; and in the Black and Hispanic areas, most of these properties and businesses were owned by Koreans. But though we should understand the resentment towards the Koreans as class-based, it is necessary to put this in the context of the overall situation. In L.A., the Black working-class's position deteriorated in the late 1970s with the closure of heavy industry, whereas at the end of the 1960s they had started to be employed in large numbers. This was part of the internationalization of L.A.'s economy, its insertion into the Pacific Rim center of accumulation which also involved an influx of mainly Japanese capital into downtown redevelopment, immigration of over a million Latin Americans to take the new low-wage manufacturing jobs that replaced the jobs Blacks had been employed in, and the influx of South Koreans into L.A.'s mercantile economy. Thus while Latinos offered competition for jobs,

ways.

In America, generally, the ruling class has always promoted and manipulated racism, from the genocide of native Americans, through slavery, to the continuing use of ethnicity to divide the labor force. The Black working class experience is to a large extent that of being pushed out of occupations by succeeding waves of immigrants. While most groups in American society on arrival at the bottom of the labor market gradually move up, Blacks have constantly been leapfrogged. Moreover, the racism this involves has been a damper on the development of class consciousness on the part of white workers.

In L.A. specifically, the inhabitants of South Central constitute some of the most excluded sectors of the working class. Capital's strategy with regards these sectors is one of repression carried out by the police—a class issue. However, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) is predominantly White and its victims massively Black and Hispanic (or as P.C. discourse would have it, 'People of Color'). Unlike in other cities, where the racist nature of the split between the included and excluded sectors is blurred by the state's success in co-opting large numbers of Blacks onto the police force, in L.A. capital's racist strategy of division and containment is revealed in every encounter between the LAPD and the population—a race issue.

When the Blacks and Hispanics of L.A. have been marginalized and oppressed according to their skin color, it is not surprising that in their explosion of class anger against their oppressors they will use skin color as a racial shorthand in identifying the enemy, just as it has been used against them. So even if the uprising had been a "race riot," it would still have been a class riot. It is also important to recognize the extent to which the participants went beyond racial stereotypes. While the attacks on the police, the acts of appropriation and attacks on property were seen as proper and necessary by nearly everyone involved, there is evidence that acts of violence against individuals on the basis of their skin color were neither typical of the rebellion nor widely supported. In the context of the racist nature of L.A. class oppression, it would have been surprising if there had not been a racial element to some of the rebellion. What is surprising and gratifying is

the parasitical commodity for its human host. For those who reduce people to objects, objects seem to acquire human qualities and truly human manifestations appear as unconscious "animal behavior." Thus the chief humanist of Los Angeles, William Parker, could say: "They started acting like a bunch of monkeys in a zoo."

When California authorities declared a "state of insurrection," the insurance companies recalled that they do not cover risks at that level they guarantee nothing beyond survival. The American Blacks can rest assured that as long as they keep quiet they will in most cases be allowed to survive. Capitalism has become sufficiently concentrated and interlinked with the state to distribute "welfare" to the poorest. But by the very fact that they lag behind in the advance of socially organized survival, the Blacks pose the problems of life; what they are really demanding is not to survive but to live. The Blacks have nothing of their own to insure; their mission is to destroy all previous forms of private insurance and security. They appear as what they really are: the irreconcilable enemies, not of the great majority of Americans, but of the alienated way of life of the entire modern society. The most industrially advanced country only shows us the road that will be followed everywhere unless the system is overthrown.

Certain Black nationalist extremists, to show why they can accept nothing less than a separate nation, have argued that even if American society someday concedes total civil and economic equality, it will never, on a personal level, come around to accepting interracial marriage. That is why this American society itself must disappear—in America and everywhere else in the world. The end of all racial prejudice, like the end of so many other prejudices related to sexual inhibitions, can only lie beyond "marriage" itself, that is, beyond the bourgeois family (which has largely fallen apart among American Blacks)—the bourgeois family which prevails as much in Russia as in the United States, both as a model of hierarchical relations and as a structure for a stable inheritance of power (whether in the form of money or of social-bureaucratic status). It is now often said that American youth, after thirty years of silence, are rising again as a force of contestation, and that the Black revolt is their Spanish Civil War.

This time their “Lincoln Brigades” must understand the full significance of the struggle in which they are engaging and totally support its universal aspects. The Watts “excesses” are no more a political error in the Black revolt than the POUM’s May 1937 armed resistance in Barcelona was a betrayal of the anti-Franco war.² A revolt against the spectacle—even if limited to a single district such as Watts—calls everything into question because it is a human protest against a dehumanized life, a protest of real individuals against their separation from a community that could fulfill their true human and social nature and transcend the spectacle.

-SITUATIONIST INTERNATIONAL, December 1965

[TRANSLATOR’S NOTES]

¹The “Free Speech Movement.” See David Lance Goines’s The Free Speech Movement.

²Lincoln Brigades: Americans volunteers who went to Spain to fight against Franco during the Spanish civil war (1936-1939). POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista): Spanish revolutionary Marxist organization, allied with the anarchists in opposing the machinations of the Stalinists within the anti-Franco camp. It was largely destroyed by the Stalinists in May 1937 through a series of repressions, arrests and assassinations.

The concluding sentence (“A revolt against the spectacle . . .”) is a *détournement* from Marx: “A social revolution involves the standpoint of the whole—even if it takes place in only one factory district—because it is a human protest against a dehumanized life, because it proceeds from the standpoint of the single actual individual,

stamped with a price tag; they experience the contradictions of capital not at the level of alienated production but at the level of alienated consumption, not at the level of labor but at the level of the commodity.

“A lot of people feel that it's reparations. It's what already belongs to us.” Will M., former gang member, on the “looting”. (*International Herald Tribune*, May 8th)

It is important to grasp the importance of direct appropriation, especially for subjects such as those in L.A. who are relatively marginalized from production. This “involves an ability to understand working-class behavior as tending to bring about, in opposition to the law of value, a direct relationship with the social wealth that is produced. Capitalist development itself, having reached this level of class struggle, destroys the ‘objective’ parameters of social exchange. The proletariat can thus only recompose itself, within this level, through a material will to reappropriate to itself in real terms the relation to social wealth that capital has formally redimensioned.”

RACE AND CLASS COMPOSITION

So even *Newsweek*, a voice of the American bour-geoisie, conceded that what happened was not a “race riot,” but a “class riot.” But in identifying the events as a class rebellion we do not have to deny they had “racial” elements. The overwhelming importance of the riots was the extent to which the racial divisions in the American working class were transcended in the act of rebellion; but it would be ludicrous to say that race was absent as an issue. There were “racial” incidents: what we need to do is see how these elements are an expression of the underlying class conflict. Some of the crowd who initiated the rebellion at the Normandie and Florence intersection went on to attack a White truck driver, Reginald Oliver Denny. The media latched on to the beating, transmitting it live to confirm suburban White fear of urban Blacks. But how representative was this incident? An analysis of the deaths during the uprising shows it was not.

Still, we need to see how the class war is articulated in “racial”

were used by the in-surgents to spread their struggle. Cars of Blacks and Hispanics moved throughout a large part of the city burning their targets—commercial premises, the sites of capitalist exploitation—while at other points traffic jams formed outside malls as their contents were lib-erated. As well as being the first multiethnic riot in American history, it was its first car-borne riot. The police were totally overwhelmed by the creativity and ingenuity of the rioters.

DIRECT APPROPRIATION

"Looting, which instantly destroys the commodity as such, also discloses what the commodity ultimately implies: The army, the police and the other specialized detachments of the state's monopoly of armed violence."

Once the rioters had got the police off the streets, looting was clearly an overwhelming aspect of the insurrection. The rebellion in Los Angeles was an explosion of anger against capitalism but also an eruption of what could take its place: creativity, initiative, joy.

A middle-aged woman said: "Stealing is a sin, but this is more like a television gameshow where everyone in the audience gets to win." Davis article in *The Nation*, June 1st.

"Looters of all races owned the streets, storefronts and malls. Blond kids loaded their Volkswagon with stereo gear...Filipinos in a banged up old clunker stocked up on baseball mitts and sneakers. Hispanic mothers with children browsed the gaping chain drug marts and clothing stores. A few Asians were spotted as well. Where the looting at Watts had been desperate, angry, mean, the mood this time was closer to a maniac fiesta."

The direct appropriation of wealth (pejoratively labelled "looting") breaks the circuit of capital (Work-Wage-Consumption) and such a struggle is just as unacceptable to capital as a strike. However it is also true that, for a large section of the L.A. working class, rebellion at the level of production is impossible. From the constant awareness of a "good life" out of reach—commodities they cannot have—to the contradiction of the simplest commodity, the use-values they need are all

because the community against whose separation from himself the individual is reacting is the true community of man, true human nature" (Critical Notes on "*The King of Prussia and Social Reform*," 1844).

Part 3.

THE MOOD OF BLACK PEOPLE

Excerpt from an Interview

With Huey P. Newton

of the Black Panther Party

Movement: How would you characterize the mood of black people in America today? Are they disenchanted, wanting a larger slice of the pie, or alienated, not wanting to integrate into a burning house, not wanting to integrate into Babylon? What do you think it will take for them to become alienated and revolutionary?

Huey: I was going to say disillusioned, but I don't think we were ever under the illusion that we had freedom in this country. This society is definitely a decadent one and we realize it. Black people are realizing it more and more. We cannot gain our freedom under the present system; the system that is carrying out its plans of institutionalized racism. Your question is what will have to be done to stimulate them to revolution. I think it's already being done. It's a matter of time now for us to educate them to a program and show them the way to liberation. The Black Panther Party is the beacon light to show black people the way to liberation

You notice the Insurrections that have been going on throughout the country, in Watts, in Newark, in Detroit. They were all responses of the people demanding that they have freedom to determine their destiny, rejecting exploitation. Now the Black Panther Party does not think that the traditional riots or insurrections that have taken place are the

deluge of coverage of the rebellion follows years of total neglect of the people of South Central (except their representation as criminals and drug addicts). In South Central, reporters are now being called "image looters".

But the three fundamental aspects to the rebellion were the refusal of representation, direct appropriation of wealth and attacks on property; the participants went about all three thoroughly.

REFUSAL OF REPRESENTATION

While the rebellion in '65 had been limited to the Watts district, in '92 the rioters circulated their struggle very effectively. Their first task was to bypass their "representatives". The black leadership—from local government politicians through church organizations and civil rights bureaucracy—failed in its task of controlling its community. Elsewhere in the States this strata did to a large extent succeed in channelling people's anger away from the direct action of L.A., managing to stop the spread of the rebellion. The struggle was circulated, but we can only imagine the crisis that would have ensued if the actions in other cities had reached L.A.'s intensity.

Still, in L.A., both the self-appointed and elected representatives were bypassed. They cannot deliver. The rioters showed the same disrespect for their "leaders" as did their Watts counterparts. Years of advancement by a section of Blacks, their intersection of themselves as mediators between "their" community and US capital and state, was shown as irrelevant. While community leaders tried to restrain the residents, "gang leaders brandishing pipes, sticks and baseball bats whipped up hotheads, urging them not to trash their own neighborhoods but to attack the richer turf to the west".

"It was too dangerous for the police to go on to the streets" (Observer, May 3rd, 1992).

ATTACKS ON PROPERTY

The insurgents used portable phones to monitor the police. The freeways that have done so much to divide the communities of L.A.

incident was just a trigger. They ignored his televised appeals for an end to the uprising because it wasn't about him. The rebellion was against the constant racism on the streets and about the systematic oppression of the inner cities; it was against the everyday reality of racist American capitalism.

One of the media's set responses to similar situations has been to label them as "race riots." Such a compartmentalisation broke down very quickly in L.A. as indicated in *Newsweek's* reports of the rebellion: "Instead of enraged young black men shouting 'Kill Whitey', Hispanics and even some whites—men, women and children—mingled with African-Americans. The mob's primary lust appeared to be for property, not blood. In a fiesta mood, looters grabbed for expensive consumer goods that had suddenly become 'free'. [Well-off Black, White] and Asian-American business people all got burned." *Newsweek* turned to an "expert"—an urban sociologist—who told them, "This wasn't a race riot. It was a class riot." (*Newsweek*, May 11th, 1992).

Perhaps uncomfortable with this analysis they turned to "Richard Cunningham, 19", "a clerk with a neat goatee": "They don't care for anything. Right now they're just on a spree. They want to live the lifestyle they see people on TV living. They see people with big old houses, nice cars, all the stereo equipment they want, and now that it's free, they're gonna get it." As the sociologist told them—a class riot.

In L.A., Hispanics, blacks and some whites united against the police; the composition of the riot reflected the composition of the area. Of the first 5,000 arrests, 52 percent were poor Latinos, 10 percent Whites and only 38 percent Blacks.

Faced with such facts, the media found it impossible to make the label "race riot" stick. They were more successful, however, in presenting what happened as random violence and as a senseless attack by people on their own community. It is not that there was no pattern to the violence, it is that the media did not like the pattern it took. Common targets were journalists and photographers, including Black and Hispanic ones. Why should the rioters target the media? 1: these scavengers gathering around the story offer a real danger of identifying participants by their photos and reports. 2: The uncomprehending

answer. it is true they have been against the Establishment, they have been against authority and oppression within their community, but they have been unorganized. However, black people learned from each of these insurrections.

They learned from Watts. I'm sure the people in Detroit were educated by what happened in Watts. Perhaps this was wrong education. It sort of missed the mark. It wasn't quite the correct activity, but the people were educated through the activity. The people of Detroit followed the example of the people in Watts, only they added a little scrutiny to it. The people in Detroit learned that the way to put a hurt on the administration is to make Molotov cocktails and to go into the street in mass numbers. So this was a matter of learning. The slogan went up "Burn, baby, burn." People were educated through the activity and it spread throughout the country. The people were educated on how to resist, but perhaps incorrectly.

Part 4.

L.A. '92

The Context of a Proletarian Uprising

Distorted by the bourgeois press, reduced to a mere 'race riot' by many on the left, the L.A. rebellion was the most serious urban uprising this century. This article seeks to grasp the full significance of these events by relating them to their context of class re-composition and capitalist restructuring.

INTRODUCTION

April 29th, 1992, Los Angeles exploded in the most serious urban uprising in America this century. It took the federal army, the national guard and police from throughout the country five days to restore order, by which time residents of L.A. had appropriated millions of dollars worth of goods and destroyed a billion dollars of capitalist property. Most readers will be familiar with many of the details of the rebellion. This article will attempt to make sense of the uprising by putting the events into the context of the present state of class relations in Los Angeles and America in order to see where this new militancy in the class struggle may lead.

Before the rebellion, there were two basic attitudes on the state of class struggle in America. The pessimistic view is that the American working class has been decisively defeated. This view has held that the U.S. is—in terms of the topography of the global class struggle—little more than a desert. The more optimistic view held, that despite the weakness of the traditional working class against the massive cuts in wages, what we see in the domination of the American left by single

issue campaigns and "Politically Correct" discourse is actually evidence of the vitality of the autonomous struggles of sections of the working class. The explosion of class struggle in L.A. shows the need to go beyond these one-sided views.

BEYOND THE IMAGE

As most of our information about the rioting has come through the capitalist media, it is necessary to deal with the distorted perspective it has given. Just as in the Gulf War, the media presented an appearance of full immersion in what happened while actually constructing a falsified view of the events. While in the Gulf there was a concrete effort to disinform, in L.A. the distortion was a product not so much of censorship as much as of the total incomprehension of the bourgeois media when faced with proletarian insurrection. As Mike Davis points out, most reporters, "merely lip-synched suburban clichés as they tramped through the ruins of lives they had no desire to understand. A violent kaleidoscope of bewildering complexity was flattened into a single, categorical scenario: legitimate black anger over the King decision hi-jacked by hard-core street criminals and transformed into a maddened assault on their own community." Such a picture is far from the truth.

The beating of Rodney King in 1991 was no isolated incident and, but for the chance filming of the event, would have passed unnoticed into the pattern of racist police repression of the inner cities that characterizes the present form of capitalist domination in America. But, because of the insertion of this everyday event into general public awareness the incident became emblematic. While the mainstream television audience forgot the event through the interminable court proceedings, the eyes of the residents of South Central L.A. and other inner cities remained fixed on a case that had become a focus for their anger towards the system King's beating was typical of. Across the country, but especially in L.A., there was the feeling and preparation that, whatever the result of the trial, the authorities were going to experience people's anger. For the residents of South Central, the King