

# **RECOGNITION OF EXCELLENCE**

**Flames, Ashes, and Tears**

**- Heidi Garcia Carmen -**

On the night of March 3, 1991 a man named George Holliday happened to videotape something that would reveal to the Los Angeles Community and to the rest of the nation, the strong presence of racism that still exists in contemporary society. On his balcony of his Lake View Terrace Apartment he witnessed the horrific beating of an African American man named Rodney King. Inhumanly beaten by LAPD officers Laurence Powell, Theodore Briseno, and Timothy Wind, King suffered various unnecessary injuries after having had the police chase his tail lights through the LA County.

This 89 second video was given two days later to the KTLA news channel who aired it, stirring conflict for the police officers who were found present at the incident. Twelve days after the incident Sergeant Stacey Koon and three other officers were charged with brutal attack through the use of weapons against a person incapable of defending himself. However it took nearly one year for a jury that coincidentally had no colored members, to state its verdicts. This twelve-person jury unaware of what their words would spark in the city of L.A. liberated all officers of their charges, finding them not guilty of what they indeed had been responsible for. The only exception was Officer Laurence Powell who had one assault charge which ended in a deadlocked jury, meaning that the jury was unable to reach an agreement over the case presented to them.

On April 29, 1992 another troublesome incident arises, this time on the cross streets of Florence Boulevard and Normandie Avenue in the neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles. The police station is informed of cans being thrown at driving motorists and they then arrive to deal with the problem however once arriving they encounter no more conflict for nearly three hours. This incident unlike others is not one made to be kept on low-profile quite the opposite

actually; this event flickers the flame that will result in various uprisings through the City of Angles, attracting the attention of the entire country. One of many victims was truck driver Reginald Denny, who was dragged out of his cab by three African-American men who nearly kill him after viciously beating him up with a variety of weapons. Luckily he is aided by four members of the crowd who approach him after being left on the concrete and take him to safety. This is just the beginning though; the people of the community want to be heard and believe that the only way they will, is by creating violent statements that will cause heads to turn.

The Los Angeles Police Department is slow in solving this situation and within hours violence has spread throughout every corner of the city. Traffic is stopped and private property is destroyed including cars, shops, businesses, and buildings. People are screaming throughout the streets some with injuries and others causing such injuries. It is now that Mayor Tom Bradley begins to move and urgently calls for Governor Pete Wilson to order the National Guard to activate 2,000 reserve soldiers. As the sun rises the following morning, the city of LA wakes up to a fog of greyness caused by the flames of the previous night, with ashes everywhere, and tears of fear in the eyes of the members of the community. At the end of the day freeways have been closed as well as schools, bus service has been cancelled throughout the city along with any sport games, and employees are told to remain at home.

The L.A. Riots as these three days of violence and destruction came to be known as resulted in the death of 55 people, the injuries of about 2,000 people, and the arrest of nearly 7,000 members of the community; not including the \$1 billion cost of property damage.

My community has been greatly changed by the 4.29 L.A. Riots. They were known for creating a peace rally on May 2, 1992 in which members of Koreatown marched through the

streets in demand of racial equality and peace as well as support for the local merchants who remained guarded by military forces. Today I walk around my neighborhood, my dad who at the time was already living here can point out every physical change that has occurred due to the violence of April 29, 1992. He will tell me that there used to be a door on one side of the library that was not there before, as well as pointing out a gasoline station that was built on top of the ashes that used to be his home. Other than the physical changes within my community, changes among the people living in it can also be depicted. Organizations such as the Korean Immigrants Workers Alliance is formed by Korean and Hispanic groups of people that aid and support each other as well as well as exchanging and learning from each other's cultures. The L.A. Riots of 1992 will continue to change my community; stronger bonds will form between the members that make up this neighborhood as well acceptance of the backgrounds that anyone can come from. Although the riots caused destruction and fear nonetheless this will allow for communities such as mine to come together and grow prosperous and strong for future populations.