

Jacqueline Girouard

Dr. Hanson

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Los Angeles Riots

On April 29, 1992, mass chaos spread through Los Angeles as what are now known as the Los Angeles riots began. Buildings and cars were burned, stores were looted, and civilians as well as police were attacked and even shot. By the end of the riots, fifty to sixty people had been killed and two thousand injured. Damage caused by the riots over a period of less than a week totaled around one billion dollars. Around the world, people were stunned as they watched the violence unfold live on TV in their living rooms. However after nearly fifteen years, questions still remain about the origins of the Los Angeles riots: did they merely consist of opportunistic criminal activities or were they truly a case of race riots resembling those of the South which had occurred around thirty years earlier?

The direct cause of the outbreak of the riots was the ruling in the Rodney King case earlier that day. In March of 1991, King was stopped by police for driving recklessly. When ordered out of car, he charged at one of the police officers and threw the others to the ground. In response, King was tasered, tackled, and beaten by the four policemen. The policemen, three of whom were White and one Hispanic, were charged with using excessive force and acquitted by an almost all White jury on April 29, 1992.

When the riots started later that night, police were extremely slow to react. When truck driver Reginald Denny was beaten by a black mob, it was black neighbors and not LAPD who rescued him. The Los Angeles Police and Fire Departments did not respond

to this and other similar calls because they posed danger to the officers and firemen.

However, this only helped spread the chaos and confusion as violence broke out all over the city. Eventually, they gained control over the situation with the help of the California National Guard and four thousand soldiers from the United States Army and Marines.

By the fifth day, the riots were largely over but the damage they caused was not only temporary. Fractured race relations in Los Angeles were far from healed and the situation remained fragile for years after. Much of the violence was in fact racially motivated and came in response to anger over the acquittal of the police officers, which many perceived to be a result of Rodney King being Black and the officers White.

However, a substantial portion of the crime may have been committed by criminals who just used the situation at hand to their advantage. No matter the cause, the riots live on in the people they hurt, both physically and through their livelihood.