

James H. Johnson, Jr. is Professor of Geography and Director of the Center for the Study of Urban Poverty at UCLA. His research interests include the study of interregional black migration, interethnic minority conflict in advanced industrial societies, and urban poverty and social welfare policy in America.

Cloyzelle K. Jones is Professor of Education at the University of Michigan—Dearborn. His research interests focus on the education of the urban poor, affirmative action issues in higher education, and urban poverty.

Walter C. Farrell, Jr. is Professor of Educational Policy and Community Studies at the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee and a National Research Affiliate in the Center for the Study of Urban Poverty at UCLA. His research focuses on the race and class underpinnings of the urban underclass and urban education and social issues.

Melvin L. Oliver is Associate Professor of Sociology and Associate Director of the Center for the Study of Urban Poverty at UCLA. His research focuses on interethnic minority conflict in advanced industrial societies, urban poverty and public policy in America, and black social networks in cities.

The Los Angeles Rebellion: A Retrospective View

James H. Johnson, Jr.
University of California, Los Angeles

Cloyzelle K. Jones
University of Michigan—Dearborn

Walter C. Farrell, Jr.
University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee

Melvin L. Oliver
University of California, Los Angeles

The Los Angeles rebellion of 1992 is evaluated from an urban political economy perspective. After discussing the anatomy of the rebellion and assessing retrospectively the outcome of the police brutality trial, the civil unrest is situated within the broader context of the recent demographic, social, and economic changes occurring in Los Angeles society. This is followed by a critical review of existing policies and proposals advanced to rebuild Los Angeles. An alternative strategy for rebuilding south central Los Angeles, which seeks to address the real “seeds” of the rebellion, is proposed.

This article was written nearly six weeks after widespread civil unrest erupted in Los Angeles on April 29, 1992, following the not-guilty verdict in the trial of the four white police officers accused of using excessive force in the arrest of Rodney King, a black motorist, approximately 15 months earlier. The looting and fire bombings have stopped, the fires have been extinguished, the National Guardsmen and the federal troops have been withdrawn, the loss of life and property has been assessed, and efforts to clean up and rebuild Los Angeles are under way. For the most part, a sense of calm—albeit ever so tenuous—has returned to the city, affording academics, government officials, the media, and the general public the opportunity to reflect on the causes and consequences of the civil unrest.

In this article, we reflect on the Los Angeles civil disorder of 1992 from an urban political economy perspective. We begin by discussing the anatomy of the civil unrest and comparing it with other civil disorders in recent history. We then make a few retrospective comments about the police brutality trial and the events that occurred in its immediate aftermath. Next, we situate the civil unrest within the broader context of the recent demographic, social, and economic changes occurring in the Los Angeles society. We follow this with a brief but critical review of the existing policies and proposals that have been advanced to “rebuild” Los Angeles. Finally, we outline our own strategy for redeveloping south central Los Angeles, one which is designed to address the real “seeds” of the civil unrest.

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TABLE 1
Toll from Selected Rebellions

City/State	Date	Number Arrested	Number Injured	Number Dead	Property Damage	Other Characteristics
Newark, NJ	July 12-17, 1967	n.a.	1,500	26	\$58,796,605	300 fires set
Detroit, MI	July 23-28, 1967	7,000	2,000	43	\$162,396,707	—
Los Angeles, CA	August 11-17, 1965	n.a.	1,032	34	\$182,565,079	—
Washington, DC	April 4-9, 1968	6,036	1,202	9	\$45,292,079	—
Los Angeles, CA	April 29-30, 1992	16,291	2,383	43	\$785 million-\$1 billion	500 fires set

SOURCE: Data from "Toll from Other Riots," *USA Today*, May 5, 1992, p. 4A; Timothy Noah and David Wessel, "Urban Solutions: Inner City Remedies Offer Novel Plans—and Hope, Experts Say," *Wall Street Journal*, May 4, 1992, pp. A1, A16.

NOTE: n.a. = not available.

TABLE 2
Law Enforcement Personnel on Duty

Los Angeles Police and County Sheriff's Deputies	3,720
California Highway Patrol	2,300
Fire	2,700
National Guard	10,000
Army	2,500
Marines	1,500

SOURCE: Data from "L.A. Aftermath at a Glance," *USA Today*, May 6, 1992, p. 3A.

ANATOMY OF THE REBELLION

The recent civil unrest in Los Angeles was the worst such event in recent U.S. history. None of the major civil disorders of the 1960s, including the Watts rebellion of 1965, required a level of emergency response or exacted a toll—in terms of loss of life, injuries, and property damage and loss—comparable to the Los Angeles rebellion of 1992 (Table 1). The burning, looting, and violence that ensued following the rendering of a not-guilty verdict in the police brutality trial required the deployment of not only the full forces of the LAPD and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, but also 10,000 National Guardsmen and 3,500 military personnel (Table 2). The Fire Department received 5,537 structure fire calls and responded to an estimated 500 fires. An estimated 4,000 businesses were destroyed. Forty-three people died and 2,383 people were injured, including 20 law enforcement and fire personnel. Property damage and loss has been estimated at between \$785 million and \$1 billion (Table 1).

In contrast to the civil disorders of the 1960s, this was a multiethnic rebellion. The diversity is reflected in Table 3, which depicts, for the period April 30 through May 4, arrests by race/ethnicity. It has been estimated that 1,200 of the 16,000-plus arrested were illegal aliens, roughly 40% of whom were handed over to INS officials for immediate deportation (Table 4). Also in contrast to the civil disorders of the 1960s, the burning and looting were neither random nor limited to a single neighborhood; rather the response was targeted, systematic, and widespread, encompassing much of the legal city. This fact has led us to purposefully and consistently refer to the civil unrest as a *rebellion* as opposed to a *riot*.

THE VERDICT AND THE REBELLION IN RETROSPECT

We think it is safe to say that both the verdict rendered in the police brutality trial, and the widespread burning, looting, and violence that ensued after the jury issued its decision, *shocked*

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TABLE 3
Los Angeles Rebellion, 1992: Arrest by Race/Ethnicity (April 30 through May 4, 1992)

	<i>LAPD</i>	<i>Sheriff's Department</i>
Latino	2,764	728
Black	2,022	810
White	568	72
Other/unknown	84	2,408
Total	5,438	4,018

SOURCE: Data from Virginia I. Postrel, "The Real Story Goes Beyond Black and White," *Los Angeles Times*, May 8, 1992, p. A11.

TABLE 4
Los Angeles Rebellion, 1992: Illegal Aliens Arrested and Deported by Country of Origin

Mexico	360
El Salvador	62
Guatemala	35
Honduras	14
Jamaica	2
Other countries	4
Total (N)	477

SOURCE: Data from George Ramos and Tracy Wilkinson, "Unrest Widens Rifts in Latino Population," *Los Angeles Times*, Washington edition, May 8, 1992, p. 1.

most Americans. In retrospect, however, we would like to suggest that both the verdict and the subsequent rebellion were quite predictable.

The outcome of the trial, in our view, was predictable for two reasons. The first pertains to the defense attorney's successful bid for a change of venue for the trial. Simi Valley, the site of the trial, as well as Ventura County more generally, is a predominantly white community known for its strong stance on law and order, as evidenced by the fact that a significant number of LAPD officers live there.¹ Thus the four white police officers were truly judged by a jury of their peers.² Viewed in this context, the verdict should not have been unanticipated.

The second development that made the outcome of the trial predictable, in retrospect, was the defense attorneys' ability to put King, instead of the four white police officers, on trial. (We should note here, parenthetically, that the media are also guilty in this regard, as evidenced by its consistent characterization of the case as "The Rodney King Trial.") The defense attorneys, in effect, played the so-called race card; they painted King as unpredictable, dangerous, and uncontrollable, much as George Bush, in the 1988 presidential campaign, used Willie Horton, the convicted rapist released on a temporary work furlough only to commit another heinous crime, to paint Michael Dukakis as being soft on crime.³

In today's society, the Willie Horton stereotype, recent surveys tell us, is often applied categorically to black males, irrespective of their social and economic status, but especially if they reside in the inner city.⁴ It is our contention that the jury agreed with the defense attorneys' portrayal of King as dangerous and uncontrollable, and thus rendered a verdict in favor of the four white police officers, notwithstanding the seemingly irrefutable videotaped evidence.

Why do we think, in hindsight, that the civil unrest following the verdict in the police brutality trial was predictable? We believe that the response was not about the verdict in the police brutality trial per se; rather, the civil unrest reflected the high degree of frustration and alienation that had built up among the citizens of south central Los Angeles over the past 20 years. The rebellion, as we view it in retrospect, was a response not to a *single* but rather *repeated* acts of what is widely perceived in the community to be blatant abuse of power by the police and the criminal justice system more generally.⁵

The civil unrest, as we view it in retrospect, was also a response to a number of broader, external forces that have increasingly isolated the south central Los Angeles community, geographically and economically, from the mainstream of the Los Angeles society.⁶ These forces include recent structural changes in the local (and national) economy; wholesale disinvestment in the south central Los Angeles community by banks and other institutions, including the local city government; and nearly 2 decades of conservative federal policies that have simultaneously adversely affected the quality of life of the residents of south central Los Angeles and accelerated the decline and deterioration of their neighborhoods.

Moreover, these developments were occurring at a time when the community was experiencing a radical demographic transformation, an unprecedented change in population accompanied by considerable tensions and conflict between long-term residents and the more recent arrivals.⁷ Viewed from this perspective, the verdict in the police brutality trial was merely the straw that “broke the proverbial camel’s back.”⁸

SEEDS OF THE REBELLION

The videotaped beating of Rodney King was only the most recent case in which there were serious questions about whether LAPD officers used excessive force to subdue or arrest a black citizen. For several years the LAPD has spent millions of taxpayers’ dollars in compensation to local citizens who were victims of abuse, illegal search and seizures, and property damage. Moreover, the black citizens of the city of Los Angeles have been disproportionately victimized by the LAPD’s use of the choke hold, a tactic employed to subdue individuals who are perceived to be uncooperative. During the 1980s, 18 citizens of Los Angeles died as a result of LAPD officers’ use of the choke hold, and 16 of them reportedly were black.⁹

Accordingly, the not-guilty verdict rendered in the police brutality trial was also only the most recent in a series of cases in which the decisions emanating from the criminal justice system were widely perceived in the black community to be grossly unjust. This decision came closely on the heels of another controversial verdict in the Latisha Harlins case. A videotape revealed that Harlins—an honor student at a local high school—was fatally shot in the back of the head by a Korean shopkeeper following an altercation over a carton of orange juice. The shopkeeper was sentenced to 6 months of probation.¹⁰

These and related events have occurred in the midst of drastic demographic change in south central Los Angeles. Over the past 2 decades, the community has been transformed from a predominantly black to a mixed black and Latino area (Figure 1). Today, nearly one-half of the south central Los Angeles population is Latino. In addition, there also has been an ethnic succession in the local business environment, characterized by the exodus of many of the Jewish shopkeepers and a substantial influx of small, family-run Korean businesses. This ethnic succession in both the residential environment and the business community has not been particularly smooth. The three ethnic groups—blacks, Latinos, and Koreans—have found themselves in conflict and competition with one another over jobs, housing, and scarce public resources.¹¹

Part of this conflict stems from the fact that the Los Angeles economy has undergone a fairly drastic restructuring over the past 2 decades.¹² This restructuring includes, on one hand, the decline of traditional, highly unionized, high-wage manufacturing employment; and on the other, the growth of employment in the high-technology manufacturing, the craft specialty, and the advanced services sectors of the economy. As Figure 2 shows, south central Los Angeles—the traditional industrial core of the city—bore the brunt of the decline in manufacturing employment, losing 70,000 high-wage, stable jobs between 1978 and 1982.¹³

At the same time that these well-paying and stable jobs were disappearing from south central Los Angeles, local employers were seeking alternative sites for their manufacturing activities. As a consequence of these seemingly routine decisions, new employment growth nodes or “technopoles” emerged in the San Fernando Valley, in the San Gabriel Valley, and in El Segundo near the airport in Los Angeles County, as well as in nearby Orange County (Figure 3).¹⁴ In addition,

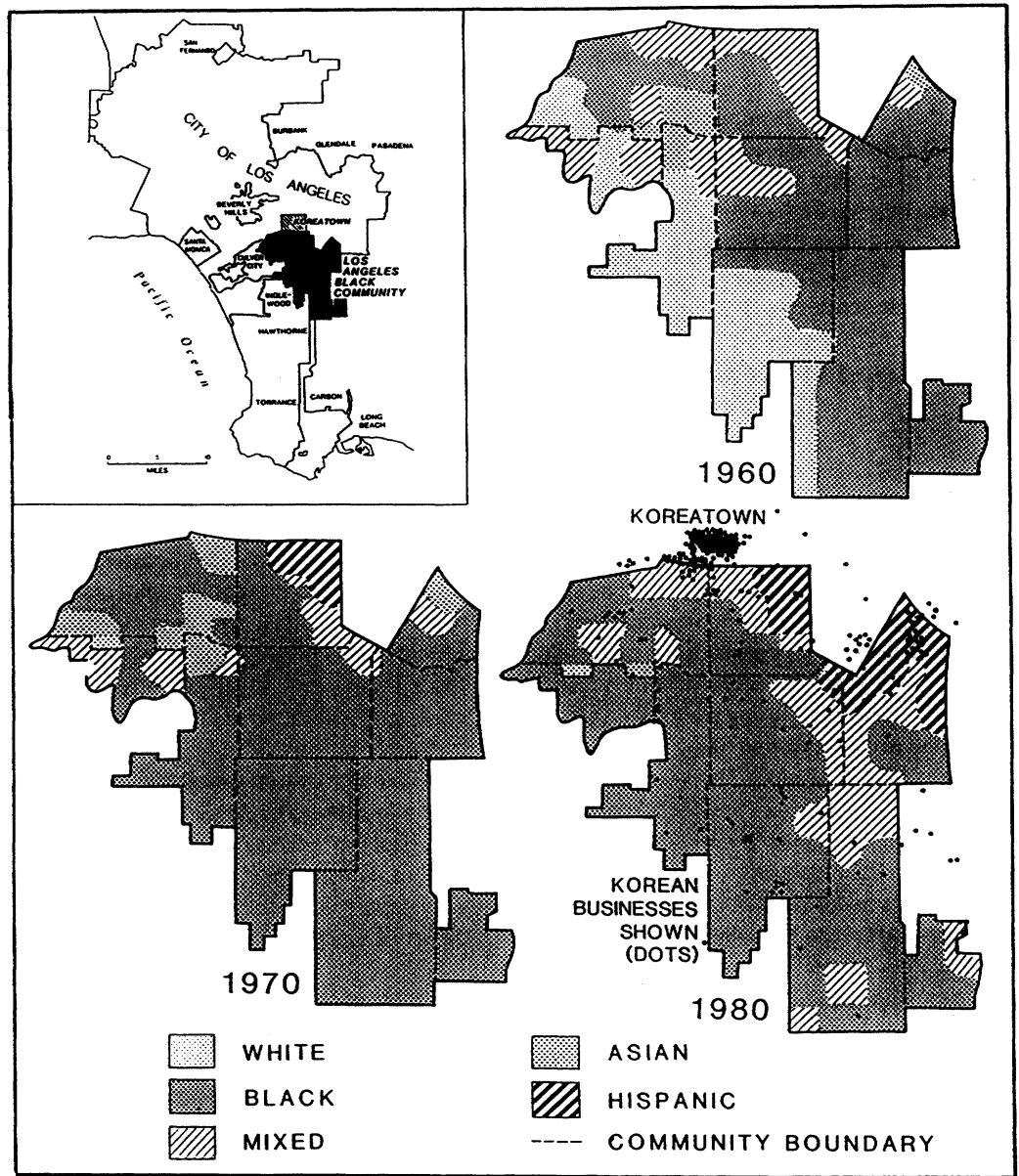


Figure 1: Ethnic Change in South Central Los Angeles, 1960-80, and Locations of Korean Businesses, 1987
 SOURCE: Los Angeles Community Development Department, *Ethnic Clusters of Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Community Development Department, 1977, 1982); and Korean Chamber of Commerce of Los Angeles, *Directory of Korean Businesses* (Los Angeles: Korean Chamber of Commerce of Los Angeles, 1987).

a number of Los Angeles-based employers established production facilities in the Mexican border towns of Tijuana, Ensenada, and Tecate. Between 1978 and 1982, over 200 Los Angeles-based firms, including Hughes Aircraft, Northrop, and Rockwell, as well as a host of smaller firms, participated in this deconcentration process.¹⁵ Such capital flight, in conjunction with the plant closings, has essentially closed off to the residents of south central Los Angeles access to what were formerly well-paying, unionized jobs.¹⁶

It is important to note that, although new industrial spaces were being established elsewhere in Los Angeles County (and in nearby Orange County as well as along the U.S.-Mexico border), new employment opportunities were emerging within or near the traditional industrial core in south central Los Angeles (Figure 3). But, unlike the manufacturing jobs that disappeared from

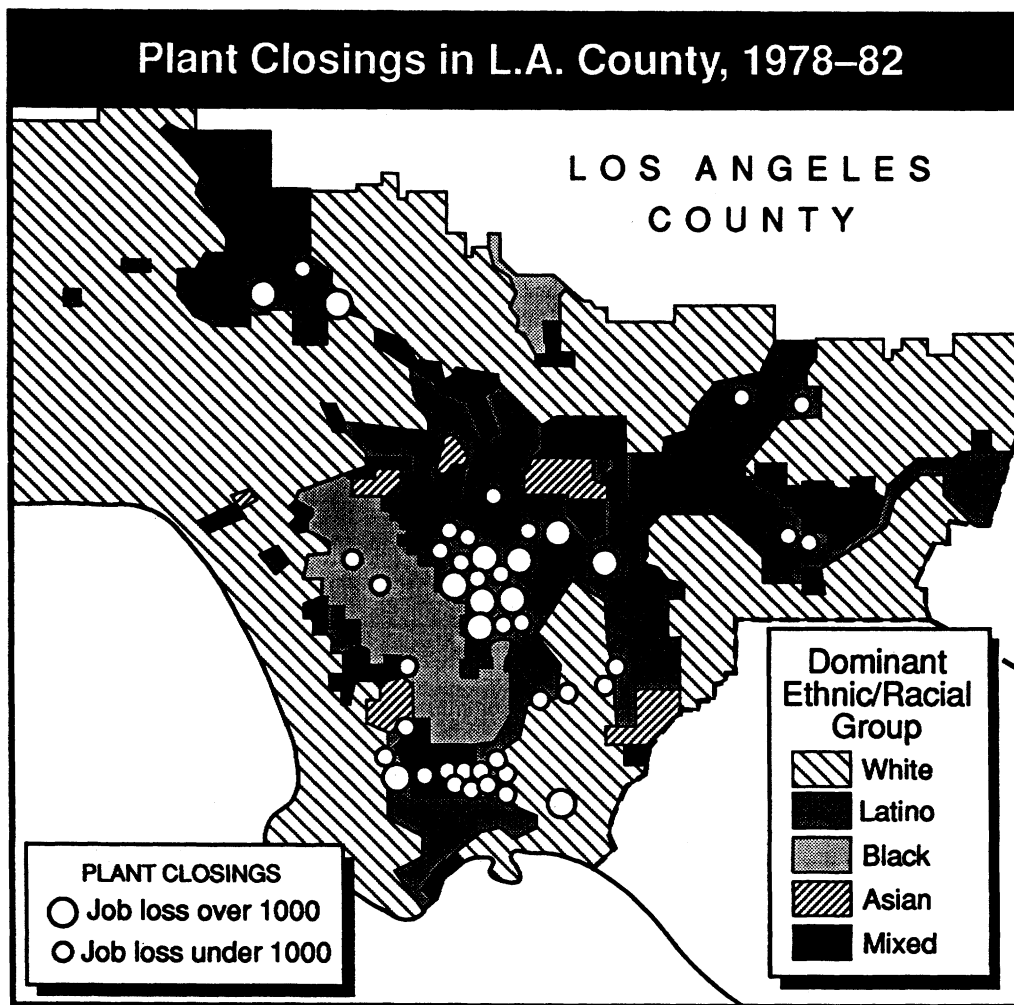


Figure 2: Plant Closings in L.A. County, 1978-82

SOURCE: Data from U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1990 Census of Population* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, 1991); and The Data Center, *Plant Shutdown Directory* (Oakland, CA: The Data Center, 1978-1982).

this area, the new jobs are in competitive sector industries, which rely primarily on undocumented labor and pay, at best, minimum wage.

In part as a consequence of these developments, and in part as a function of employers' openly negative attitudes toward black workers, the black male jobless rate in some residential areas of south central Los Angeles hovers around 50%. Whereas joblessness is the central problem for black males in south central Los Angeles, concentration in low-paying, bad jobs in competitive sector industries is the main problem for the Latino residents of the area. Both groups share a common fate: incomes below the poverty level (Figure 4). One group is the working poor (Latinos) and the other is the jobless poor (blacks).¹⁷

In addition to the adverse impact of structural changes in the local economy, south central Los Angeles also has suffered as a result of the failure of local institutions to devise and implement a plan to redevelop and revitalize the community. In fact, over the past 2 decades, the local city government has pursued consciously a policy of downtown and westside redevelopment at the expense of south central Los Angeles. One only needs to look at the skyline of downtown and the so-called Wilshire corridor—that 20-mile stretch extending along Wilshire Boulevard from downtown to the Pacific Ocean—to see the impact of this policy.¹⁸

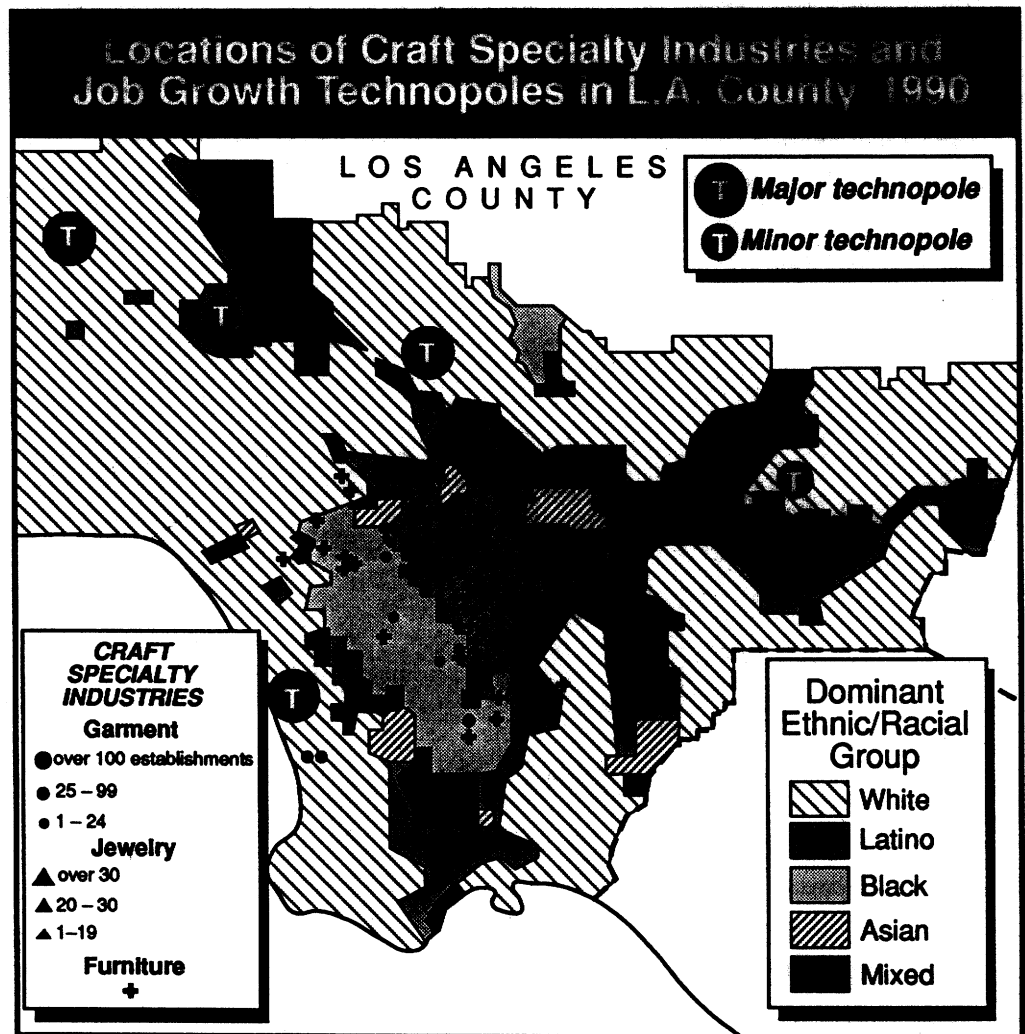


Figure 3: Locations of Craft Specialty Industries and Job Growth Technopoles in L.A. County, 1990
 SOURCE: Data from Maya Blum, Kathryn Carlson, Estela J. Morales, Ross Nussbaum, and Patricia J. Wilson, "Black Male Joblessness, Spatial Mismatch, and Employer Preferences: A Case Study of Los Angeles," unpublished paper, Center for the Study of Urban Poverty, University of California, Los Angeles, May 1992.

Finally, the seeds of the rebellion are rooted in nearly 2 decades of conservative policy making and implementation at the federal level. Many policy analysts talk about the adverse impact on minorities and their communities of Democratic President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty" programs of the 1960s, but we must not lose sight of the fact that the Republicans have been in control of the White House for all but 4 (the Carter years) of the past 20 years.¹⁹ A number of public policies implemented during this period, and especially during the years when Ronald Reagan was president, we contend, served as sparks for the recent civil unrest. Three of these policy domains are worthy of note here.

The first pertains to the federal government's establishment of a laissez faire business climate in order to facilitate the competitiveness of U.S. firms. Such a policy, in retrospect, appears to have facilitated the large number of plant closings in south central Los Angeles and capital flight to the U.S.-Mexico border and other Third World countries. Between 1982 and 1989, there were 131 plant closings in Los Angeles, idling 124,000 workers. Fifteen of those plants moved to Mexico or overseas.²⁰

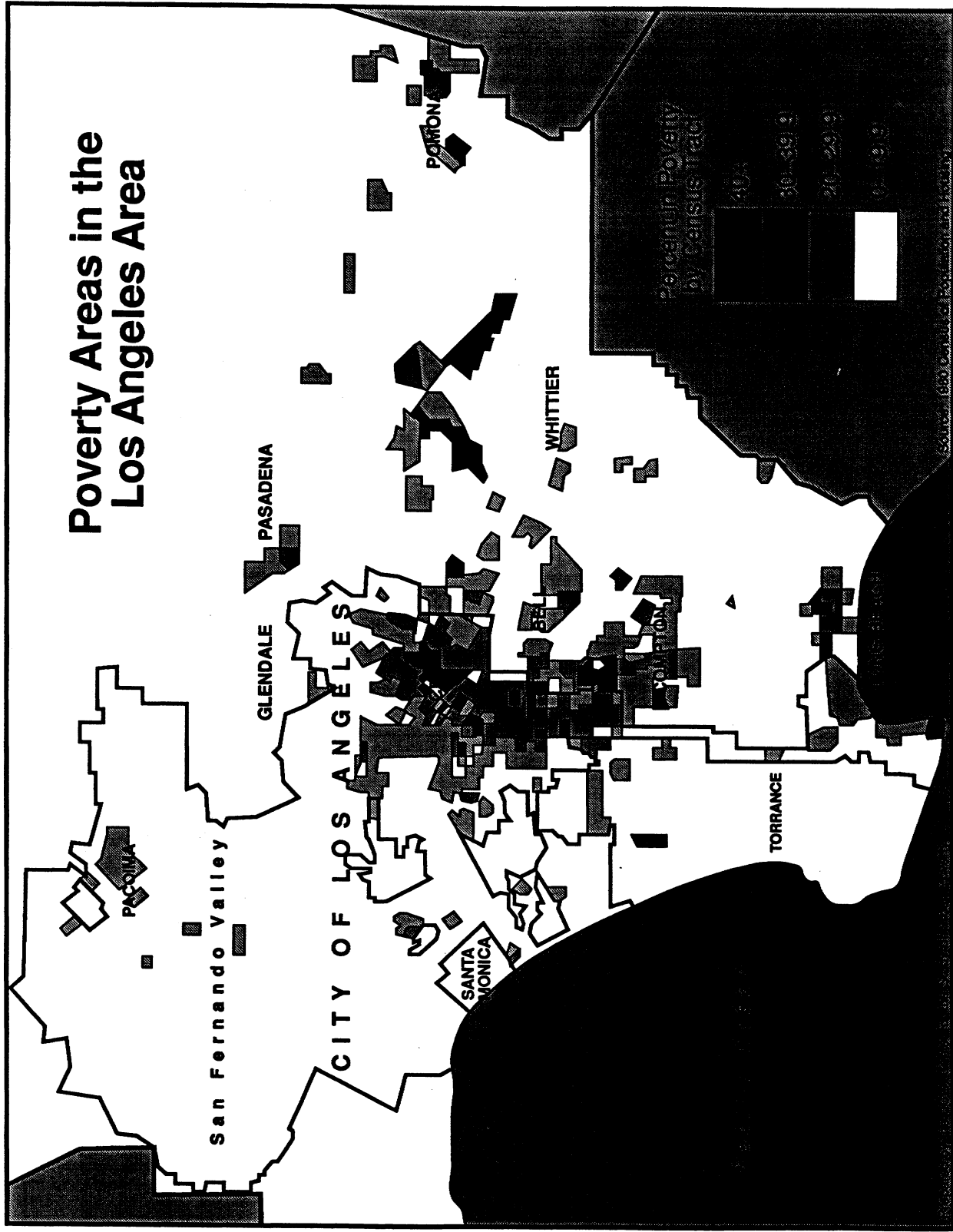


Figure 4: Poverty Areas in the Los Angeles Area
 SOURCE: Data from U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980 Census of Population and Housing, Census Tracts (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, 1981).

The second involved the federal government's dismantling of the social safety net in minority communities. Perhaps most devastating for the south central Los Angeles area has been the defunding of community-based organizations (CBOs). Historically, CBOs were part of that collectivity of social resources in the urban environment that encouraged the inner-city disadvantaged, especially disadvantaged youth, to pursue mainstream avenues of social and economic mobility and discouraged dysfunctional or antisocial behavior. In academic lingo, CBOs were effective "mediating" institutions in the inner city.²¹

During the past decade or so, however, CBOs have become less effective as mediating institutions. The reason for this is that the federal support they received was substantially reduced. In 1980, when Reagan took office, CBOs received an estimated 48% of their funding from the federal government.²² As part of the Reagan Administration's dismantling of the social safety net, many CBOs were forced to substantially reduce programs that benefited the most disadvantaged in the community. Inner-city youth have been most adversely affected by this defunding of community-based initiatives and other safety-net programs.

It should be noted, moreover, that the dismantling of the social safety net has been replaced with a criminal dragnet. That is, rather than allocate support for social programs that discourage or prevent disadvantaged youth from engaging in dysfunctional behavior, over the past decade or so, the federal government has pursued a policy of resolving the problems of the inner city through the criminal justice system.

Given this shift in policy orientation, it should not be surprising that, nationally, 25% of prime working-age young black males are either in prison, in jail, on probation, or otherwise connected to the criminal justice system.²³ Although reliable statistics are hard to come by, the anecdotal evidence suggests that at least 25% of the young black males in south central Los Angeles have had a brush with the law. What are the prospects of landing a job if you have a criminal record? Incarceration breeds despair and in the employment arena, it is the scarlet letter of unemployability.²⁴

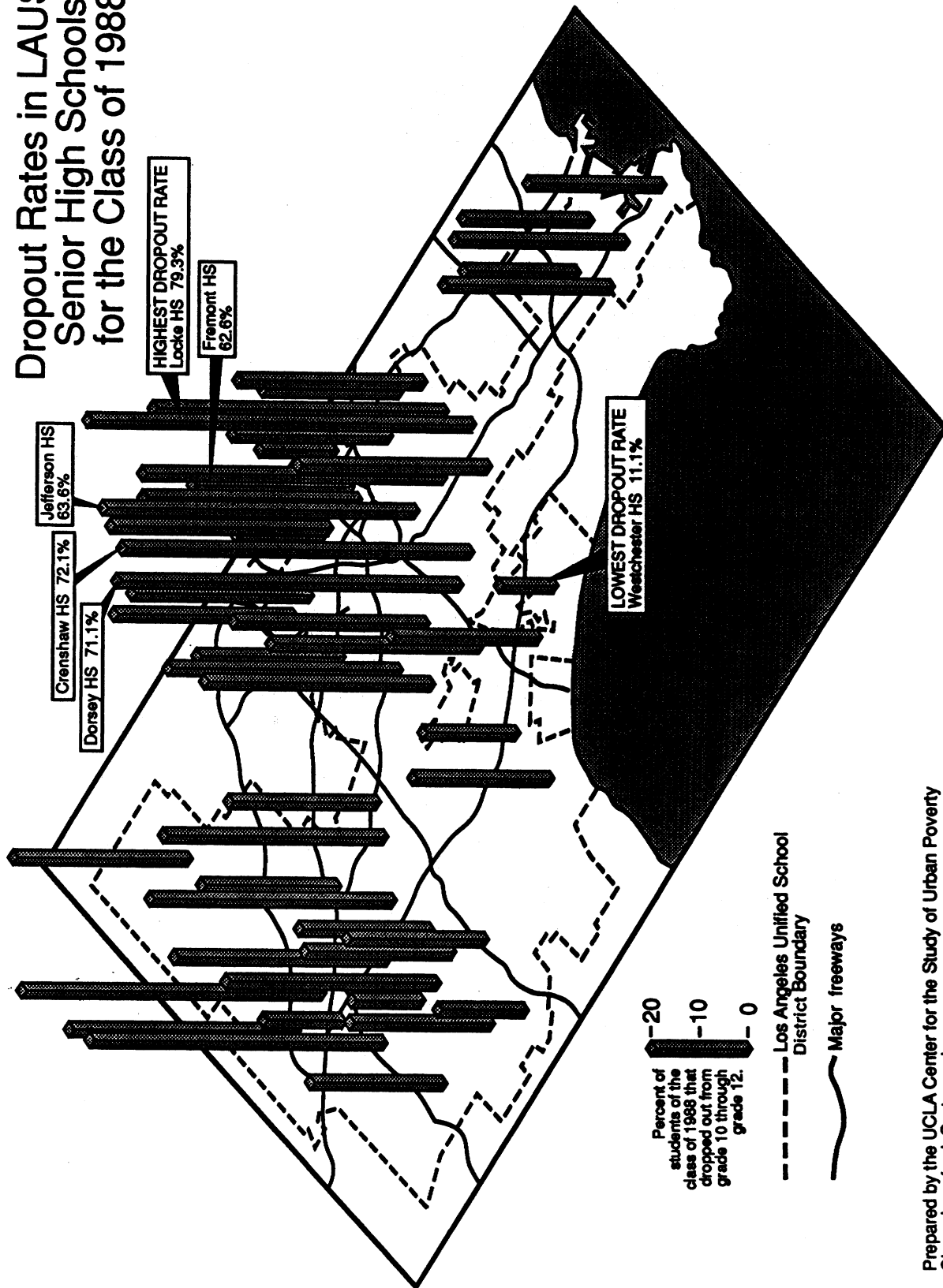
Educational initiatives enacted during the late 1970s and early 1980s, which were designed to address the so-called crisis in American education, constitute the third policy domain. There is actually a very large body of social science evidence that shows that such policies as tracking by ability group, grade retention, and the increasing reliance on standardized tests as the ultimate arbiter of educational success, have, in fact, disenfranchised large numbers of black and brown youth. In urban school systems they are disproportionately placed in special education classes and are more likely than their white counterparts to be subjected to extreme disciplinary sanctions.²⁵

The effects of these policies in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) are evident in the data on school-leaving behavior. For the Los Angeles Unified School district as a whole, 39.2% of all of the students in the class of 1988 dropped out at some point during their high school years. However, for high schools in south central Los Angeles, the drop-out rates were substantially higher, between 63% and 79% (Figure 5). It is important to note that the drop-out problem is not limited to the high school population. According to data compiled by LAUSD, approximately 25% of the students in the junior high schools in south central Los Angeles dropped out during the 1987-88 academic year (Figure 6).

Twenty years ago it was possible to drop out of school before graduation and find a well-paying job in heavy manufacturing in south central Los Angeles. Today, however, those types of jobs are no longer available in the community, as we noted previously. Juxtaposing the adverse effects of a restructured economy and the discriminatory aspects of education reforms, what emerges is a rather substantial pool of inner-city males of color who are neither at work nor in school. These individuals are, in effect, idle; and previous research shows us that it is this population that is most likely to be in gangs, to engage in drug trafficking, and to participate in a range of other criminal behavior.²⁶ Moreover, we know that it is this population of idle minority males who experience the most difficulty forming and maintaining stable families, which accounts, at least in part, for the high percentage of female-headed families with incomes below the poverty level in south central Los Angeles.

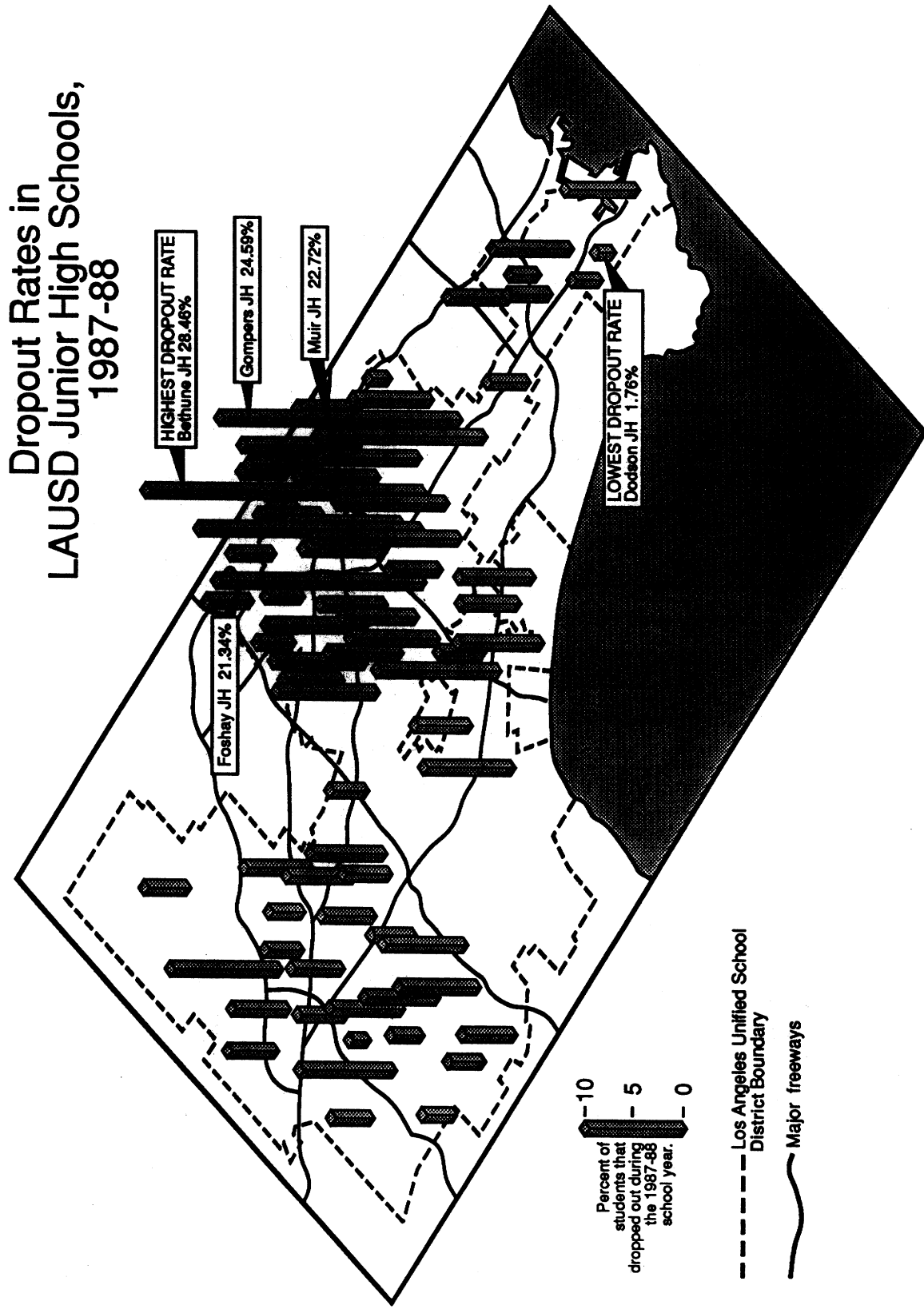
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Dropout Rates in LAUSD Senior High Schools, for the Class of 1988



Prepared by the UCLA Center for the Study of Urban Poverty
 Chase Langford, Cartographer

Figure 5: Dropout Rates in Los Angeles Unified School District Senior High Schools, Class of 1988
 SOURCE: California Basic Educational Data System, *Three Year Summary: Number of Dropouts in California Public High School Instruction* (Sacramento, CA: CBEDS, 1989).



Prepared by the UCLA Center for the Study of Urban Poverty
Chase Langford, Cartographer

Figure 6: Dropout Rates in Los Angeles Unified School District Junior High Schools, 1987-88
SOURCE: LAUSD, *Dropout Rates in LAUSD Junior High Schools, 1978-88*. Research Development Department (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Unified School District, 1989).

TABLE 5
The Federal Blueprint

<i>Program</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>\$ Allocation</i>
Emergency aid	To address immediate needs of citizens impacted by the crisis.	\$600 million
"Weed and Seed"	Beef up law enforcement and social services (Headstart, Job Corps, WIC, Safe Haven Program) in the inner city.	\$500 million
"Project HOPE"	Encourage homeownership among residents of public housing projects	\$1 billion
"Move to Opportunity"	Five-city plan to subsidize welfare families that move from depressed inner-city areas, using housing vouchers and providing advice.	\$20 million
Welfare reform	Raise to \$10,000 from \$1,000 the amount of assets that welfare recipients may accumulate without losing benefits. Builds on a Wisconsin Plan to discourage welfare mothers from having more babies.	
Urban enterprise zones	Establishment of specifically designated areas where investment and job creation would be encouraged through incentives such as tax breaks and regulating relief.	

SOURCE: Data from Jessica Lee, "Bush Presents His Urban Policy," *USA Today*, May 6, 1992, p. 8A.

THE FEDERAL BLUEPRINT

How do we simultaneously deal with the seeds of the rebellion, as we have characterized them above, and rebuild the physical infrastructure of south central Los Angeles? In attempting to answer this question, we shall limit the discussion here to the federal government's blueprint, as the local "Rebuild LA" initiative remains somewhat vague in both scope and content.²⁷

Table 5 highlights the Bush Administration's plan to revitalize the south central Los Angeles community. In actuality, the main elements of the plan constitute what Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Jack Kemp, termed, prior to the Los Angeles rebellion, as his blueprint for a "Conservative War on Poverty."²⁸

Kemp promotes enterprise zones, as Table 5 shows, as being the key to job creation and retention in the inner cities. He proposes to eliminate capital gains taxes and reduce levies for business that will locate in specified inner-city areas. However, there is no history of success of such strategies in poor communities like south central Los Angeles.

Moreover, recent research has indicated, as we noted earlier, that those white businesses in the inner city are especially reluctant to hire black males. Employer responses to a field survey in Chicago showed that they generally embrace the prevailing racial stereotypes about this group—that they are lazy, lack a good work ethic, are ineducable, and, perhaps most important, dangerous.²⁹

Couple this social reality with the fact that the major priorities for businesses when making locational decisions are access to markets, access to a quality labor force (code words for no blacks), infrastructure, and crime rates. These business factors are considered to be much more important in site selection than tax rates. And where enterprise zones have been successful, employers have brought their work force with them rather than employing community residents, or they used these enterprise locations as warehouse points where there is a need for few workers.³⁰

Secretary Kemp has had a long-term commitment to empower the poor by making them homeowners—the theory being that individuals will have a stronger commitment to maintaining that which they own and to joining in other efforts to enhance their general neighborhood environment. Project HOPE, as it is called, would make homeownership affordable (Table 5). This idea had languished in the Bush Administration for the past 4 years, until the Los Angeles rebellion pushed it to center stage.³¹

However, this program would lock poor people into communities that are isolated, socially and economically, from the mainstream employment and educational opportunities. And it would do nothing to expand the housing stock. Project HOPE is analogous to the reservation status provided to Native Americans in the government's effort to empower them. As a result, in part, of their isolation over time, Native Americans currently have some of the highest rates of unemployment, alcoholism, and domestic abuse of any American ethnic and racial group.

The federal blueprint, as Table 5 shows, also includes monies to give the poor inner-city residents of south central Los Angeles greater choice in deciding what school their children will attend. The encouragement of educational choice among public and private schools—using public dollars—needs to be carefully monitored. Although promoted as the solution to the crisis in public education, poor parents are at risk of being losers in a system where choice is “unchecked.” The much heralded Wisconsin Parental Choice Plan has achieved a modicum of success because this public/private initiative was carefully designed to meet the educational needs of poor children. The legislature structured it to mandate that private educational providers would develop their recruitment strategies and curricular offerings to specifically accommodate poor students. Because nonpoor youngsters already had a wide range of educational choice, it was appropriate that poor children—who are the least well served in our educational system—have their interests served. Educational choice should be driven by the needs of the poor if we are to revitalize education in inner cities.³²

Finally, the Bush Administration proposes to spend \$500 million on a “Weed and Seed Program,” which is designed to rid the community of the violent criminal element and to provide support for programs like Headstart and Job Corps, which are known to benefit the urban disadvantaged and their communities (Table 5). As it is currently envisioned, however, the program places too much emphasis on the “weed” component and not enough on the “seed” component. Of the \$500 million proposed for the program, only \$109 million is targeted for “seed” programs like Headstart. With nearly 80% of the proposed funding targeted for the “weed” component, the primary goal of the program is, clearly, to continue the warehousing of large numbers of poor, inner-city youth in the penal system.³³

This, in our view, is a misplaced programmatic focus, as it is ever so clear that harsher jail and prison terms are not deterrents to crime in inner-city areas like south central Los Angeles. What is needed in south central Los Angeles, instead, is more “seed” money; and to the extent that increased police power is deployed in south central Los Angeles, it should be via a community policing construct where officers are on the street interfacing with community residents prior to the commission of a crime.

We are, quite frankly, dubious of the so-called conservative war on poverty and, in particular, of its likely impact in south central Los Angeles. The federal blueprint, and apparently the local “Rebuild LA” initiative headed by Peter Ueberroth as well, are built on the central premise that, if the proper incentives are offered, the private sector will, in fact, play the leading role in the revitalization and redevelopment of south central Los Angeles. We do not think this is going to happen for the reasons stated earlier: The types of governmental incentives currently under consideration in Washington are not high on private businesses’ locational priority list.

In view of these facts—and the social science evidence is clear on the ineffectiveness of enterprise zone legislation both in Britain and in 36 states in this country³⁴—we firmly believe that what is needed to rebuild south central Los Angeles is a *comprehensive public works employment program*, modeled on President Roosevelt’s Works Progress Administration (WPA) program of the 1930s. Jobs to rebuild the infrastructure of south central Los Angeles can provide meaningful employment for the jobless in the community, including the hard-core disadvantaged, and can be linked to the skilled trades’ apprenticeship training programs.

To incorporate the hard-core disadvantaged in such a program, however, would require a restructuring of the current Private Industry Council, Job Training Partnership Act Program (JTPA). The program must dispense with its performance-based approach in training where funding is tied to job placement. This approach does not work for the hard-core disadvantaged because training agencies, under the current structure, have consistently engaged in creaming—recruiting the most “job ready” segment of the inner-city population—to ensure their continued success and funding. Meanwhile, the hard-core unemployed have received scant attention and educational upgrading.³⁵

We are convinced that a WPA-type initiative combined with a restructured JTPA program will go a long way toward resolving the chronic jobless problem, especially among young males of color in the community, and toward rebuilding the infrastructure of south central Los Angeles.

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Such a program would have several goals that would enhance the social and economic viability of south central Los Angeles. First, it would create meaningful jobs that could provide the jobless with skills transferable to the private sector. Second, it would rebuild a neglected infrastructure making south central Los Angeles an attractive place to locate for business and commerce. Third, and most important, by reconnecting this isolated part of the city to the major arteries of transportation, by building a physical infrastructure that could support the social and cultural life of this rich multicultural area (e.g., museums, public buildings, housing), and by enhancing the ability of community and educational institutions to educate and socialize the young, this plan would go far in providing a sustainable “public space” in the community. For it is our contention that only when south central Los Angeles is perceived as an economically vibrant and socially attractive public space will the promise of this multicultural community be fulfilled. Thus far, private sector actions and federal government programs and proposals have done nothing to facilitate this goal.

CONCLUSIONS

The fires have been extinguished in south central Los Angeles and other cities, but the anger and rage continue to escalate, and they are likely to reemerge during another long, hot summer in our large urban centers. Political, business, and civic leaders have rushed to advance old and new strategies and solutions to this latest urban explosion. But much of what is being proposed is simply disjointed and/or *deja vu*.

Clearly there is a need for additional money to resolve the underlying causes of this urban despair and devastation, but money alone is not enough. Government is constitutionally mandated to ensure “domestic tranquility,” but government alone cannot empower poor communities. And although blacks and other people of color have a special role and obligation to rebuild their neighborhoods because they are the majority of the victims and the vandals, they cannot solely assume this burden of responsibility.

What is needed, in our view, is a reconceptualization of problem solving where we meld together, and invest with full potential, those strategies offered from liberals and conservatives, from Democrats and Republicans, and from whites and people of color. Three cities (Milwaukee, Los Angeles, and Detroit, respectively) have served, individually and collectively, as urban laboratories where we have engaged in action research and proffered solutions to urban problems, which have generated violent outbursts.

The contentious state of police/minority community relations has served as the linchpin of urban unrest in each instance. While relations have improved in several large cities in recent years, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) has been frozen in time. Black and Hispanic males have been particularly brutalized in their encounters with police, the majority of whom are white males. But more disconcerting is the fact that poor, central-city minority communities have become more crime ridden of late. Thus minorities find themselves in the ambiguous situation of needing greater police services on the one hand and protection from the excesses of those same services on the other. This contradictory situation had kept relations between these groups at a race/class boiling point.

More police officers are desperately needed in high-crime communities disproportionately populated by the poor. Local, state, and federal dollars (federal funds for this initiative are in the crime bill before Congress) need to be quickly allocated toward this end. At present, violent felons are beginning to outnumber police officers in many of our urban centers.³⁶ As we noted previously, this increase in police power should be deployed via a community policing program. Such an effort can serve to control minor offenses and to build trust between police and community residents. Community policing has evidenced positive results in Detroit and Philadelphia, and is showing encouraging signs in Milwaukee and numerous other large and small cities. In addition, the intensive recruitment of minority officers and specific, ongoing (and evaluated) diversity training will further reduce police/minority community tensions. But most important in this effort is

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enlightened, decisive leadership from the office of the chief, a position of abysmal failure in Los Angeles.

If the central-city poor are provided comprehensive assistance, there is a high probability that we can bring them into mainstream society, enhance their acceptance of personal responsibility, and improve their personal values. But a change in personal values alone, as suggested by some public experts, will not substitute for job training, job creation, and the removal of racial stereotypes and discrimination.³⁷ The spatial concentration of contemporary poverty presents significant challenges to policymakers and human service providers alike. Although numerous programs and initiatives have been instituted to combat these problems, they suffer from three important weaknesses.

First, there is a lack of coordination among programs aimed at improving the life chances of citizens in poor communities. Second, no systematic steps have been taken to evaluate existing efforts, to insure that the programs are effectively targeting the "hardest to serve" adults with low skills and limited work history and youth who are teen parents or school dropouts. Third, there is no comprehensive strategy for planning future resource allocations as needs change and as these communities expand in size.

A recent national study of training and employment programs under the Job Training and Partnership Act revealed that little has been done to address the remedial educational needs of high school drop-outs, and that those with the greatest need for training and employment services are not targeted. However, overcoming these and other program weaknesses is not sufficient to solve these complex problems. A strategic plan is needed to alleviate the social ills associated with concentrated poverty.

There is a need to conduct a comprehensive inventory of agencies and institutions that provide services to populations in poverty areas. We also need to assess and evaluate the service providers' performance in an attempt to identify strengths, weaknesses, and missing links in their service delivery systems. Based on these findings, a strategy should be devised for a more effective and coordinated use of existing resources and for generating new resources to address unmet needs. Finally, we need to propose a plan of action that would encourage development in the 1990s—those that link together the various program initiatives.

And most important, representatives of the affected ethnic and racial groups must be in key decision-making roles if these efforts are to achieve success.³⁸ Citizens of color, individually and through their community, civic, and religious institutions, bear a responsibility to promote positive values and lifestyles in their communities and to socialize their youth into the mainstream. But they cannot do this alone.

They cannot be held accountable for the massive plant closings, disinvestments, and exportation of jobs from our urban centers to Third World countries. There must be an equality in status in responsibility and authority across race and class lines if we are to resolve our urban crises. Government, in a bipartisan fashion, must direct its resources to those programs determined to be successful with the poor, the poor must be permitted to participate in the design of programs for their benefit, and society at all levels must embrace personal responsibility and a commitment to race and gender equity.

Let us conclude, simply, by saying that if we do not take vigilant and positive action quickly to become more actively involved in south central Los Angeles and in poor communities in other U.S. cities, there will be a fire next time, only the next time will be much sooner than it was the last time.

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