



M. David Lee FAIA
President

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To the Membership of the
Boston Society of Architects:

Writing to you some days after the initial events in Los Angeles gives me the opportunity to add some context and perhaps some perspective to a painful set of realities which confront not just the people of Los Angeles, but all Americans. Before one rushes to conclusions about what happened last week, I think it is important to consider two definitions drawn from the Thorndike Barnhart World Book Dictionary:

Riot - A disturbance, confusion, disorder, wild, violent public disturbance.

Revolt - A rising up in active resistance against authority. Revolt emphasizes casting off allegiance and refusing to accept existing conditions or control.

Most white people in America view what happened last week as a **riot**, most blacks saw it as a **revolt**. Understanding this difference in perception is vital if we are to begin to redress the grievances which erupted in violence and protests across the country.

Virtually everyone has seen the videotaped beating of Rodney King. Many have also seen the tapes of white persons being assaulted by blacks in the aftermath of the verdict. But how many of you have also seen the video tape of the 15-year old African-American girl shot in the back and killed by a Korean shop owner in a dispute over a container of orange juice? [The shop keeper was given probation only.]

How many of you have forgotten about the death of Yusef Hawkins, a young black man who was set upon by a white mob in the Bensonhurst section of Brooklyn two years ago? Not many black Americans have forgotten these events nor can we forget the many incidences of police disrespect or outright abuse virtually every black person has experienced directly or witnessed.

What makes the King case particularly frustrating is that for many years African-Americans and latino Americans have tried to bring the injustices we have suffered to the consciousness of our fellow citizens. Most often the response has been skepticism or outright disbelief. This time though, the evidence was there for all to see. It was the kind of violence perpetrated upon us by some policemen on any given night in any major city in the country. Surely this time we thought, the result would be just, and that our embattled communities might finally get some positive attention and relief.

For those of us in the black and latino communities who have tried to reach out to the children of the city - to be role models, to encourage them to believe in themselves and their futures, this was a crushing blow. This court decision was the latest and most dramatic example that America on the whole, neither values our lives or our communities.

Many have placed blame upon black leadership for the violent reactions in Los Angeles, for the breakdown of the family structure, youth gang violence, drugs, and the physical deterioration of the cities of America. I ask, what tools has that leadership been given to work with? Over the last decade there has been an almost total disinvestment in cities. Manufacturing jobs have been in a steady state of decline with many of those jobs targeted to areas of cheap labor off shore and in Mexico.

There is a great hew and cry about drugs and drug related violence in the inner city. No one however is addressing with the same fervor, two fundamental aspects of the problem:

- A) How are the drugs getting into the country? These street gangs do not have boats or planes. Why hasn't the war on drugs focused on those who are importing and distributing the drugs?
- B) More importantly, how do we attack the conditions of poverty and hopelessness which drives one to seek escape through drugs?

Much is made of the crime and violence which plagues our cities and which incidentally, impacts blacks and latinos the most, despite the disproportionate fears of many whites. Relatively little condemnation though, is directed at the economic violence and white collar crime exemplified by the savings and loan scandals, insider trading, discrimination in bank lending practices and in the workplace, all of which has been statistically documented.

Senator John Kerry in a recent speech at Yale University questioned the viability of Affirmative Action. I have been included in a group of minority business leaders who have been meeting with the Senator to express our discontent with his position on this matter. Like so many other things in America, when it comes to issues of race, things are driven more by perception than reality. There has never been a true commitment to Affirmative Action in this country!

Recent survey results from two national studies show that blacks and latinos still face discrimination in hiring far more frequently than their white counterparts. In the two studies, blacks and latinos with resumes and dress identical to whites were rejected for employment and denied interviews at a much higher rate than the white applicants experienced. If the Senator or any of you still question the need for Affirmative Action you need only to consider the deliberate make-up of the Rodney King jury and the results. Far too often, people with attitudes closer to that jury, populate the personnel offices and loan committees of America.

Like most of you, I watched the television coverage of the Los Angeles situation. I repeatedly heard the question asked, "Why would the people of South Central Los Angeles destroy businesses in their own communities?" Perhaps another set of questions should first be asked. Were those burned out businesses owned by local residents? Did they employ people from the neighborhood? Did they treat their customers with dignity and respect?

The double standards of justice and ethics which operate in this country cannot continue. The underlying causes of the problems in Los Angeles stalk every major city in America. A massive show of force and a temporary calm on the streets will not mask indefinitely, the deep seated anger and frustration felt by many persons of color. You must try to imagine yourself in their shoes. Many of these persons are poorly educated, but they are not dumb. They have sense enough to question, as you must, a cold war domestic strategy which has failed to invest in cities. Meanwhile, we have become history's biggest debtor nation, largely due to the military build-up to confront Ronald Reagan's "evil empire", the Soviet Union. Now we are told we cannot afford to invest in infrastructure, job training, or education because of the deficit and the need to loan millions of dollars to that same "evil

empire". In Chicago, the failure to spend \$10,000 to repair a crucial piece of infrastructure resulted in a billion dollars worth of damage to the city. In Los Angeles, the failure to invest in the black and latino communities may cost the nation a lot more.

As architects, planners, and urban designers, we have a role to play in bringing this country together. As citizens we have an ever greater role to play, and on this point I particularly want to address the white male. This presidential race is aimed specifically at capturing your vote. You are characterized by the media and the pundits as caring little about the inner city, as being insensitive to issues of sexism, opposed to Affirmative Action, and absolutely opposed to any tax increases. Some of you **do not** feel that way and you must make yourselves heard. Senators Kerry and Kennedy, and our Congressional Representatives must hear from you. Our state and local officials must also hear from you. You must challenge the media on this misrepresentation of your views.

To the membership as a whole, please consider joining those BSA committees and task forces which are addressing homelessness, health care facilities, housing, legislative affairs, and urban design. I will also be forming a focus group on the infrastructure and the new Surface Transportation Act. Each of us must also lobby the Governor to direct more State aid into the cities and target resources toward the rebuilding of the Massachusetts infrastructure, coupled with programs to train and employ city residents as part of the work force.

Finally, I reiterate something I said in my initial address to the membership. The well being of this country as a whole is related to the health of its cities and a fairer distribution of the national wealth. This time it was primarily African-Americans and Hispanics who revolted. However, if the disparity between the "haves" and "have nots" continues to widen, the next time they will be joined by desperate people of many hues.

Very truly yours,



M. David Lee FAIA
President,
Boston Society of Architects

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