

WILLIAM PANNELL

NEW INTRODUCTION BY **JEMAR TISBY**

**THE
COMING
EXPANDED EDITION
RACE
WARS**

**A CRY FOR JUSTICE,
FROM CIVIL RIGHTS TO
BLACK LIVES MATTER**



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HERE WE GO AGAIN

Negroes firmly believe that police brutality and harassment occur repeatedly in Negro neighborhoods. This belief is unquestionably one of the major reasons for intense Negro resentment against the police.

US RIOT COMMISSION REPORT, MARCH 1968

WHEN I WAS a kid I got hit in the head by accident with a ball bat. My vision blurred, my ears vibrated with a sound like a distant bell, and my legs turned to Silly Putty. I felt the impact clear down to my stomach. And what was worse, after my head began to clear, was the embarrassment that this should happen to me. I was too alert, too athletic, to be the victim of such a thing. Maybe it could happen to one of my sisters, but not to me.

A riot is like getting hit in the head with a ball bat. No one sees it coming, and when struck we reel like emotional drunkards for weeks afterward. We grope for balance; we are betrayed by behaviors that are embarrassing to recall six weeks later. In the

aftermath of the Los Angeles violence of 1992, people of all races confessed together that we had never smiled at so many Hispanics in our lives; nor noticed with deference so many Black people; nor felt so uneasy around Koreans.

I remember exactly where I was when the rumble started. I am sitting in my car, feet resting on the driveway pavement. It is a nice set of wheels, new and red. It is evening, a time to watch the sun romance the nearby mountains, receiving in return a blush of soft crimson. This night, though, the sky is gray and the sun has surrendered to the times. There is a soft whiff of smoke in the air. I know what it is and whence it comes. And I wish I could turn more than my back against it. But one of the burdens of being a Black male is that smoke follows you. This time it is Los Angeles. Twenty-seven years after the riots in Watts, the City of Deferred Dreams explodes like a raisin in the sun. Again.

In 1965 I was in Detroit. I confess to a certain smugness then. We “knew” it would not happen to us. It did, of course. In 1992 in my cozy neighborhood, now eerily quiet, I experience *déjà vu*. Old images rush to mind and, what’s worse, old emotions: remorse, regret, fear, anger—especially anger. Justified or not, I am forced to admit that I don’t like cops—not Black cops, not Hispanic cops, not white cops. They are not the Constables on Patrol they used to be; they haven’t been for years. Instead, unfortunately, I have come to view them more as an army of occupation, with citizens playing the role of civilians. And hard as I try to overcome my bias, I must admit that I especially don’t like white cops. Not only do they preoccupy my mind, but they are in my guts. The taste is like bile.

The LA riots were triggered by an encounter between white cops and a Black man. That’s nothing new. Robert Conot, a historian of riots in Los Angeles, observes that the Watts uprising began when a California highway patrolman followed a Black male off the freeway and attempted an arrest. Twenty-seven years

later, a California highway patrolman followed a Black man and his companions and called for local backup, and the rest is history. Rodney King became part of Black urban lore. Black people will recall his name, as they recall the name of Emmett Till. True, Rodney King's personal life to date leaves much to be desired. He might admit to that himself. True, he violated the law and should have been arrested. Still, he is a human being, created in the image of God, deserving of dignity even in his sinfulness. But to out-of-control cops that night, he was just another gorilla in the mist.

Yet the revelation of Rodney King's brutal beating at the hands of four white cops was not what triggered a riot. After all, this was merely another in a lifetime of incidents Black men have suffered at the hands of police. Not all of them have been captured on video. What set off the riots was the decision of a predominantly white jury to acquit the four officers. The policemen were tried by a jury of their peers, and their white peers found them guiltless. From all appearances, the white system had worked for white police officers.

The decision shocked the entire nation, Black and white alike. For millions of white Americans, the decision starkly revealed that racism is not nearly so dead as they thought it was. Many white people were as puzzled and outraged as Black people. Yet, for the most part, whites were in the position to maintain some emotional distance from the decision and its implications. For the most part, they did not take to the streets, burn down the town, or loot stores. We can hope that many wrote their congressmen, called mayors' offices across the country, or sent telegrams to President Bush. More importantly, we can hope that white people, especially Christians, understood more of the feelings of desperation and helplessness so prevalent among their Black brothers and sisters.

By and large, Black people, unlike whites, could not help but take this decision more personally. They had seen this script

before. It was not the first time Black people in Los Angeles had suffered severe reprimands to their humanity at the hands of white representatives of the legal system. Just months before the King incident, Latasha Harlins, age fifteen, was murdered in a neighborhood store. The killer was a Korean shopkeeper, angered by what appeared to her to be the girl's attempt to steal an item from the store. What was recorded on the store's television surveillance system revealed the coldblooded killing of the young girl as she was walking toward the front door. After a long and sensational trial, Soon Ja Du was found guilty of voluntary manslaughter. A white judge sentenced her to a ten-year suspended prison term, with five years of probation, four hundred hours of community service, and a five-hundred-dollar fine.

During this same period, two Black men were released from prison after serving seventeen years. New evidence conclusively demonstrated they had been telling the truth all along, that they were innocent of the crime of which they had been charged and convicted. The evidence also indicated that the men had been "set up" by local police.

Then there was Eula Love, a Black woman trying to find her way through the maze of gas-telephone-utility-company regulations and frustrated because service had been shut off. By the time the police arrived to settle an increasingly volatile relationship between her and the company, she had armed herself with a knife. Cornered in her yard, she pulled that knife and was promptly shot several times. It was Eula with a knife against four cops armed with plenty of bullets, but not with know-how or training to subdue a lone woman nor with the patience to reason with her. Maybe they were busy that day, and it saved time just to "blow her away."

This is part of the context within which Blacks viewed the not-guilty verdict in the Rodney King case. There is more.

Black people remember, for example, the spectacle of the Iran-Contra scandal: hundreds of hours of primetime exposure

on television, the expenditure of millions of tax dollars. What was the result of all that sound and fury? One new Marine Corps hero who spent some country-club prison time, then emerged to write a book and make speeches at Liberty University.

Then there were the savings and loan scandals: Michael Milken, Ivan Boesky, Wall Street, and international and multi-national banking scams implicating some of the top names in American politics and business. Black people know that most of those people will escape serious damage and will live to cheat again from deep in their suburban hideaways. But let a Black man get followed off a freeway at night, and the brother's gone. The message this sends to Black people is that if you are going to be a successful thief, you have to steal something really big—like the country. Or you could pull it off if your father happens to live in the White House.

Los Angeles is not in a class by itself. The litany of mistreatment of Blacks by our judicial and political systems could be easily recited in other cities. But again, these incidents by themselves do not explain the violent reaction either in Watts in 1965 or in greater Los Angeles in 1992. The real issues lie deeper today, as they did twenty-seven years ago. The 1968 Riot Commission Report, in its assessment of the causes of the Watts riots, said that

disorder did not erupt as a result of a single “triggering” or “precipitating” incident. Instead, it was generated out of an increasingly disturbed social atmosphere, in which typically a series of tension-heightening incidents over a period of weeks or months became linked in the minds of many in the Negro community with a reservoir of underlying grievances.¹

And what were these “underlying grievances”? According to the commission's research, they concerned “police practices, unemployment and underemployment, inadequate housing,

inadequate education, poor recreation facilities and programs, and ineffectiveness of the political structure and grievance mechanisms.” Other grievances cited included “disrespectful white attitudes, discriminatory administration of justice, inadequacy of federal programs, inadequacy of municipal services, discriminatory consumer and credit practices, and inadequate welfare programs.”²

Any list of grievances leading up to the riots of 1992 will contain most of those same items and maybe a few more.³

These are complex issues, wherein it is not always easy to assess human responsibility and pinpoint blame. Not everyone believes these ubiquitous concerns are capable of producing civil unrest to the point of outbreaks of destruction and violence. People of that ilk attribute the violence to the work of hoodlums, and, as the attorney general of the United States said, such behavior is not to be tolerated in a “civilized country.” One local television personality, a former speechwriter for several Republican presidents, claimed that the riots were the work of “rotten people.” Bruce Herschensohn, a Republican candidate for the US Senate, said at a press conference that “the underlying cause for burning, looting, stealing, and murder is that some people are rotten. That’s the underlying cause, and those criminals exhibited no conscience and no empathy for the victims. It isn’t society. It isn’t a race. It isn’t a circled-off locality. It’s the individual.”⁴

According to this conservative Republican argument, any assessment of the violence that blames society is wrong-headed liberalism. Thus no amount of government help would suffice because, in Herschensohn’s words, “there’s nothing that government can do about human nature.”

A corollary to this argument can be heard from the winner of the 1992 Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. The Reverend Kyung-Chik Han argues that the problem in Los Angeles is the

absence of a “Christian force” strong enough to promote racial harmony. Says Han, “Why don’t you send missionaries to Black people right here in this country? It seems to me the only way to solve social problems in this country is through mission efforts among the Black people and the new immigrants.”⁵ Han, who won the million-dollar prize for his work among refugees and the poor, deserves credit for founding one of the largest churches in Seoul, Korea—the sixty-thousand-member Young Nak Presbyterian Church. But he does not realize how simplistic and superficial his analysis of the riots sounds to Black people. It should be acknowledged that what was reported in the popular press may not have been what Mr. Han intended. I do not have a high view of reporters’ capacities to understand and interpret the words of evangelical speakers. But assuming that the press fairly portrayed Han on this occasion, his remarks represent another case of blaming the victims. If so, he could benefit from studying American history.

Others hear Han’s argument as reflecting the view that the church is the only thing that matters. This view has never tolerated an admission that people need more than the church, more than Jesus, to make it. Instead, all that matters is that churches grow. If they grow because of riots, praise the Lord for the riots. Of course, Han was not saying that, but to many the logic implied in his words leads to that conclusion. And partly because he seems to offer the poor in Korea more than words, Black people view his “wisdom” on the LA crisis as racist chauvinism at best, emanating from Korea and too easily dismissed as “culture.” In two hundred years of living with racism, Black people know how it sounds, no matter from which direction it comes or how it is cloaked.

The point is that the nostrums of neither Herschensohn nor Han surprise Black people. This is the same conservative claptrap we heard in the late sixties. My Friend kept asking me,

“Don’t you think that all that those people need is Jesus?” and I would say, “Well, *you* need more than Jesus. Why do you think we need less than you do?” Not even Jesus said that he was all that people needed. He fed the hungry, provided medical care for the lame, the halt, and the blind, and chided the ultraconservatives in the religious establishment for their slavish devotion to tradition even as they ignored the claims of mercy and justice upon their resources.

Let me state for the record that I really do believe that people—all people—need Jesus. There is no other way to salvation. In Jesus Christ, all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily, and believers are complete in him. All people of all colors need only Jesus for salvation. But to make it in society, white Christians realize they need a lot more than salvation. They may expect Black people to be content with salvation in Christ. But that is not enough for the white Christians themselves. So they work hard at their jobs—sometimes both parents around the clock. They send their children to private schools or academies. They spend lots of money on their kids, ranging from good nutrition to cultural opportunities.

People desire more than salvation. That is why most white Christians have voted their pocketbooks throughout the last decade. Whether or not the political agenda has represented the best interests of the poor and the marginal in the society is a minor consideration for those who eat well and are generally well sheltered against the elements. Most people vote out of self-interest. It is not relevant to most voters that innocent children and their families are trying to eke out a living against tough odds in the city. They would rather see to it that their own children have good jobs and credit cards and that their driveway runneth over with all sorts of wheels. Even when they go to the mission field, their passports give them a better umbrella than The Hartford—namely, access to the embassy. They

always have a place to go when prayer meetings fail to halt the impending insurrection.

Nor is it surprising to hear the question again, “But why do they burn their own stores and homes?” Well, *they* don’t. Black people who own homes or have small businesses don’t burn them. The fires are set by others: frustrated, desperate, and mindless young people whose images the nation watched on network television. They were mindless but not dumb. Even in the midst of their orgy they knew that many of the properties burned in their communities are owned by persons and corporations who do not have the best interest of those communities at heart.

Some people will ask the question, “If Koreans and Jewish merchants and others can succeed, why can’t Black people succeed in the same proportions?” The question suggests a fundamental lack of appreciation for the burden of Black Americans, resulting from injustices of the past and present. We are talking about a race of people whose great-grandparents were in chains and regarded as subhuman, whose grandparents were forbidden to learn to read, whose parents have been victims of discrimination in the workplace, in the marketplace, in the academic world, and in the public square. We are talking about latent feelings of inferiority that are easily revived by the realities of contemporary racism. The question “Why can’t Blacks make it?” wrongly presumes that we start climbing from the same elevation.

It is not only the historical legacy of racism with which Blacks must contend. There is also the racism of the current age. Given the complicated social policy questions and people analyzing affirmative action from different perspectives, the average Black person might have trouble articulating his or her suspicion that somehow things are still not right: Black people still are not treated as if they are as worthy as others to pursue life, liberty, and happiness. The case of Rodney King was

uncomplicated—something all Blacks could understand: a Black man was beaten, unnecessarily, by four white cops. The not-guilty verdict from the Simi Valley courtroom sent the clear message to Black people that, after all these years, they still could not be considered fully human. Whether or not that message excuses the riots that followed the verdict, it certainly does explain them.

In spite of the similarities of the two riots twenty-seven years apart, there are some radical differences. In 1992, forty-five people died in riot-related incidents, more than for any other riot in the twentieth century. The scope of the destruction was greater than all the riots of the late sixties combined: one billion dollars. Insurance companies estimated they would lay out millions of dollars in riot claims. Additional millions were added to the budgets of the city and the country to provide firemen and national guardsmen.

In 1992, the scope was also greater in terms of the players involved. In the sixties the issues were clearly drawn, and they were between Black people and white people. White people have begun migrating deep into the suburbs, and we have not seen each other for years. But many white people were still in the city in the late sixties, in our neighborhoods and along the boulevards of business. This is no longer the case. Today, to the extent that race is a factor in urban centers, the players are more likely to be a glorious mixture of peoples. (The largest number of people arrested in Los Angeles was Mexican youths. Korean businesses were devastated. White youths eventually got into the act, and Black people were conspicuous.) To be sure, white businesses are still active in the city, even though often franchised through Black managers. The business of America is still business, but those who occupy turf in central cities have changed. Word has gotten out, and many nations have come to the barbecue. Los Angeles's recent uprising was a rainbow affair.

The potential for violence between ethnic groups has been building for years. Indeed, a check of most major periodicals in the country reveals that, from the mideighties on, they have registered concern about the gathering storm in race relations in America. From Washington to New York City, from Philadelphia to Los Angeles, there have been repeated skirmishes between African Americans and Asian Americans. The Reverend H. P. Rachel, pastor of Greater New Unity Baptist Church in Watts, put it like this in an interview in July 1987: "Koreans and other groups are taking everything we got, and America is sitting by and letting it happen. You have a powder keg."⁶

The social struggle between Blacks and whites is still a major fact of urban reality. But it is no longer the only reality. Today the social, cultural, and economic struggles are multidimensional. There is a struggle for economic turf between Koreans and Blacks. Korean Americans themselves are caught in the middle between the expectations and values of an older generation and their own, more distinctively American, set of values. There is frustration and tension as Hispanic people move into neighborhoods that in the sixties were reserved for Black people. Hispanics in the United States now number 22.4 million, or 9 percent of the country's population. And they are steadily becoming the next significant political force in the city.

Another major difference between the urban scene today and in the sixties is that the gap between the "haves" and "have-nots" has grown much wider, not just between whites and Blacks, but more importantly, between Blacks and Blacks. Some Blacks have taken great economic, political, and social strides since the great days of the civil rights movement. But not many were able to follow. Today 36 million people live in poverty in this land. About 47 percent of these people live in the central parts of our cities, compared with 30 percent in 1968. Black poverty is a significant component of urban reality. Sixty percent of the

country's Black people who live in poverty live at the core of our major cities.

Blacks, of course, are not the only ones who are poor. Issues of race must be viewed alongside such issues as urban economic policies and discrimination based on class. In general, the future looks grim. The number of poor people who live in the city is on the rise, as is the number of single-parent families. Even though these people are better educated now, they hold fewer jobs than in the past.⁷ Add to this the fact that fully one-fifth of all children in America are poor and that 50 percent of these are Black, and you have a major urban crisis that defies any attempt at a quick fix. Perhaps Kevin Phillips, better than any other columnist, has put his finger on the real difference between the riots of the sixties and those of the spring of '92:

The racial disorder of the '60s was a revolution of rising expectations; Blacks were in a hurry to get their share of a prosperous America with an expanding economy. Today, after twelve years of the Reagan and Bush administrations, with the rich getting richer and the middle class and the poor stagnating . . . these riots . . . are a revolution of diminishing expectations.⁸

Black people, trapped in central cities and in the vice grip of poverty, feel abandoned across a broad front. Even the Black "middle class" has evacuated these centers as did their white counterparts before them. Thus many upwardly mobile Black middle-class people are no longer an available resource. The tendency of this class to abandon the old neighborhood has caused many analysts, Black and white, to argue that the problem of the inner cities is more a problem of Black bourgeoisie than of white racism. This is worth considering. An ex-gang member may still respond to the plight of his old neighborhood when word of an impending threat reaches his ears in Beverly Hills. He

simply straps on his piece, drops into his BMW, and heads for South Central.

This is not always the case with Black upper-middle-class people or with the instant-millionaire sports celebrities. Not many people in the ghettos view these stars as role models, no matter what ESPN or high-priced advertisers think of them.

When the smoke clears—especially the political smoke, which is the most oppressive smoke of all—it will become clearer that Black political power has seriously eroded in the past decade. In the case of Los Angeles, this is true despite the presence of a strong Black mayor and the support of most of the liberal citizenry. Hispanics and Asians have become more visible than in past years. The future of these blocs of power appears formidable. They will be less sensitive to the traditional role of Black political power, even though they so far have ridden on its coat-tails. So the Black community in the inner city, where poverty reigns, can expect to have a very difficult time in the future, because for them there is little evidence that they even have much of a future.

But this much has not changed. I was amused at the experience of a white reporter for a major magazine who, during the riots, arrived in the liberal city of San Francisco and proceeded to a troubled spot to record the scene for his publication. He arrived in the right place at the wrong time. He became the victim of mass police arrests. He found himself handcuffed and chopped in the groin by a female cop. Thirty-three hours and several police lockups later, he recorded this warning from a fellow inmate: “I’m concerned this is just the beginning of a period in America . . . that allows the police to revoke any rules. How do you distinguish between what happened in the Mission District [in San Francisco] and what happens in some Third World countries where people can be arrested just because they happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time?”⁹

The racial identity of this inmate—a businessman—is not revealed in the article, but if he is white he has just been introduced to a reality faced by Black men all the time. He has just become a Black man, and we welcome him into this elite and somewhat exclusive company.

I fear that Los Angeles '92 is but a prelude to similar revolts throughout the country and, for that matter, around the world. From Paris, France, to Brixton, England, governments are gearing up to prevent the poor and disenfranchised from violent urban uprising. In the United States, it is just a matter of time until some cop blows it again in his or her treatment of a Black person, probably a Black man. Whether or not the incident is captured on video, it will trigger the next round of urban turmoil.

Sadly, not many people in this country seem to believe this. I recall speaking with a friend in Atlanta, a successful businessman and the father of two children. He lives in the relative safety of a nearby suburb, but he has not lost his conscience or his commitment to justice. He knows what he owes his children and is working on ensuring that they not be bigots. But like so many white people of similar conviction—and who, like him, may also be Christians—he attends a church where such things as riots in distant places are not mentioned: not even on the Sunday after Los Angeles burned and forty-five people lost their lives. My friend asked one of his pastors for some explanation of this omission in the Sunday services. The pastor responded, “It’s a matter of eschatology.”

Well, it is not easy to know what some conservative believers mean by eschatology, especially in Atlanta. My guess is that it would not relate to the housing needs of Black citizens there. In a major exposé in 1988, the city’s major newspaper revealed that segregation in housing was rampant in the metropolitan area. And it was and is not relegated to low-income housing. To the contrary, segregated housing policies and patterns are most

likely to be found at the middle- to upper-middle-income levels. The bottom of the ladder poses no threat to racists who live in more comfortable levels or to those who serve their interests in banks and other lending institutions. Bill Dedman reported after a study that “whites receive five times as many home loans from Atlanta’s banks and savings and loans as Blacks of the same income—and that gap has been widening each year.” How big is that lending pie? It was 6.2 billion dollars over a period of six years. According to the study, most loans went to all-white neighborhoods, integrated neighborhoods followed, and all-Black neighborhoods were dead last. The case of Michael Lomax is instructive. Lomax, one of the city’s major political leaders, lived in a nearly all-Black neighborhood. He ran for mayor in 1989. But even he could not escape the influence of the lending policies. Said Lomax, “If I, a powerful Black elected official, can’t get a loan, what Black person can?”

Race is the chief factor in this injustice. “Race—not home value or household income—consistently determines the lending patterns of Atlanta’s largest financial institutions,” the report said. Not surprisingly, no one is to blame. Frank Burke, chairman and CEO of Bank South, said,

The numbers you have are damning. Those numbers are mind-boggling. You can prove by the numbers that the Atlanta bankers are discriminating against the central city. It’s not a willful thing. The banks really are considered the pillars of the community. If somebody walks in and applies, they’ll get fair treatment.

If “banks are considered pillars of the community,” you can bet that bankers see themselves in the same light in spite of the scandals of recent years. Many of them go to churches, and I catch a word from one or two of those pulpits via cable television every now and again. I have yet to hear one of those fancy

preachers mention an issue such as discrimination in housing or racism in banking circles in the city. Some of those big congregations see themselves at the forefront of grand battles over biblical inspiration in seminaries and universities. It makes a man wonder, especially if he is Black and looking for help for his family, if the issue all these years in conservative circles has really been about inerrancy. After all, it doesn't matter what theory of inspiration prevails in the absence of a commitment to apply what the Bible teaches.

The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* study was a landmark report because of its sophistication. If done elsewhere, the results would very likely be similar all across the country. From West Hollywood to Yonkers, New York, the word from professionals is, "Housing discrimination is alive and well. The style has changed; it's gone underground." Of course, discrimination in housing is aimed at persons on factors other than race: age, marital status, physical handicaps, sexual orientation, or whether one has children. But by far, racial discrimination leads all other "reasons" for denial of housing.

There is evidence of discrimination in the field of education as well. The National Center for Education Information (NCEI) revealed in 1988 that white males hold the majority of high-paying jobs in the American educational system. In a survey of more than 3,000 public school administrators, the Center found that more than 95 percent of the superintendents and 76 percent of the principals were white males. Most women are not surprised to be told this, since it has been common knowledge for years that the system has been run by a group of good ole boys—good ole white boys, to be exact. When the Los Angeles school board looked for a new district superintendent in 1987, it bypassed Latino and Black candidates to hire a white male from Florida. The salary was \$141,000 per year.

The kicker in the NCEI study is that whites held the high-paying jobs as principals even in neighborhoods dominated by so-called minorities—this at a time when the issue of role models in schools was being championed by some of these same educators. What does this say to Black people? “Be like Mike. Be like Cliff Huxtable. Be like Clair. Be like Clarence. But don’t be like us. These jobs are for an insular few. We know what’s best for y’all.”

I suppose that my Atlanta friend’s pastor, by “eschatology,” meant something having to do with end-time goings-on: wars and rumors of war and so forth. This pastor and his church no doubt were in total support of the war efforts of Reagan and Bush during the past decade. Well, pastor, if you want a war, stick around: There are any number of disenfranchised people—Black and white—in and around Atlanta whose rage, once triggered, will give you a war to singe the hair of any pastor in the suburbs. And no ballyhoo about the Olympics or a Super Bowl will avert it.

There is one more thing the riots of ’92 gave me occasion to ponder: the relevance of modern-day evangelicalism. I know the term is a broad one, but here I mean primarily that cluster of organizations with headquarters in Wheaton, Illinois, or Colorado Springs, Colorado, two centers of so-called evangelical missions activity. I have in mind all those agencies that for so many years have defined orthodoxy and evangelistic practice, who have wrestled—sometimes valiantly—to define an evangelical theology for the church. I mean the network of saints who look at the world through blue eyes and tell the rest of us what they see and how it is to be understood.

The resources of my brethren—and a few sisters—are formidable both in human and economic terms. Influence among them and channeled through them is even more impressive. Some of them can pick up the phone and reach whoever is in

the White House, and I suspect they can get a former president off his horse long enough to talk. With all the stored-up influence and IOUs these people have going for them, it would seem possible that they could have predicted an urban explosion in some major city. After all, the rumblings were there; a big one was as predictable as anything from a seismic center at Cal Tech.

But there were no warnings, no urgings to prepare, no emergency units available to the churches in the event of an explosion. Conferences were still being held. Pastors from megacongregations were still convening in mountain settings to harangue seminaries for being irrelevant and to plan strategies for getting bigger and better. No Black pastors were present at these gatherings, of course, even though their churches were “mega” before church-growth experts coined the phrase. The city was not on the agenda of those who convened the conferences, perhaps because their churches are not in cities.

Today, being that they are a bit older and a lot fatter, I look for my evangelical colleagues in different places whence I did in the sixties. I know they are not in the city, so I look for them in departments of urban studies at the undergrad and graduate levels. I expect them to be leading the parade in their seminaries to prepare future leaders to meet the challenge presented by an urban world; to develop concentrations in special programs up to the PhD in how to think theologically in an urban community; to be leading the way in considering how worship and evangelism and preaching can be combined with community organization so that marginal people will have hope. And I keep looking to see if evangelical youth ministries will come up with something radical enough to snatch the souls of urban youth from the vice grip of Minister Farrakhan and his minions. Of course, it will always be easier to raise money for

youth ministries aimed at Russia or Hungary these days, but I keep looking.

Yet I must give credit where it is due. My impression is that my evangelical friends responded with more strength in LA in the nineties than in Detroit in the sixties. The same may be true when the next blast rocks the Motor City. In Los Angeles, people could be seen sweeping up the mess, caring for the bereaved, and encouraging the victims of the disaster. Food poured in from all over by the truckload. Thousands of dollars were sent to key churches to assist their leaders in the recovery efforts. Thousands of dollars came from Korean evangelical churches.

Not that anybody knew whence the help arrived. If I lived in Central Los Angeles and had been wiped out, I'm not sure I would care who wrote the check or where a friendly face came from. I would probably not stop to read the label on the box. Who in West LA ever heard of evangelicals anyway? Baptists they know; Methodists—African Methodists, at least—they know; Catholics and Pentecostals they know. But who are evangelicals? Who under these circumstances cares?

Though I am thankful for the help many evangelicals provided to ease the pain, the end point of my pondering on contemporary evangelicalism is disappointment. I expected more because, like their politically conservative counterparts, they said they had more to give. They were supposed to know more of the answers because they had learned to ask better questions after the debacle of a spent liberalism. I expected more because there has come to be an acceptance of the notion that conservative theology automatically translates into conservative politics and social agendas that sound impressive. By now, I thought, my evangelical colleagues would have put it together better, would have come up with a marriage of their theology and their

political ideology, laid it alongside the heartbreak of the city, and carved out some outposts of the kingdom there.

Those outposts are there. But their leaders won't be invited to the latest gatherings of the evangelical club. Those outposts are led by a new breed, and they have yet to be discovered. That may not be a bad thing either.