70 Years of Waiting

During the 60s I saw several television news broadcasts of Black uprisings, but not in Los Angeles where I lived. Such incidents exposed the brutality of White cops toward Black men, women, and children like me, being plummeted to the ground by the force of fire hoses and vicious attack dogs. I never thought something like that would happen here; little did I know.

The Watts Riots began on August 11, 1965, a neighborhood in Los Angeles. A White California Highway Patrolman pulled over a Black man, on suspicion of drunk driving. The officer called for backup as a crowd of onlookers began to grow. An altercation ensued between the Black man and the White cops. The group of Blacks, started throwing rocks, bottles, and other objects as there was a buildup of racial tension between the police and the community. The Black man: brother, and mother, who were in the car with him, were all arrested. At this point, all hell broke loose.

The incident did not start in Watts, but at the corners of Avalon Blvd. and Imperial Hwy, a few miles from my grandparents' lived in a quiet, well-kept neighborhood where I spent most of my summers. I was 15, attending summer school and stayed at home, however, on the weekends, and I would go to my grandparents'. The day the riot started, my mother received a phone call that there was rioting close to my grandparents' home, and my grandmother would not be picking me up for my weekend visit.

In 1964 there were two riots I observed while watching television, taking place in Harlem and Philadelphia. I never imaged that such an incident would happen here in California. The Watts Riot started on a Wednesday, and I did not go to summer school the following day. I lived about 12 miles away from where the rioting was taking place, and there was no rioting on the Westside. Within a day or two, the National Guard was in Los Angles. That morning, I awoke and looked out my upstairs bedroom window as I heard a lot of noise on the street. What I saw was surreal, something out of a WWII movie with Jeeps and tanks rolling down the streets of France, but it was L.A. and the street that ran past my house.

There were still a large number of Whites in our area, the Crenshaw Shopping Center, considered upper scale, and the location of my predominantly White summer school; I would have to travel by bus to get there. I surmised the National Guard was not here to protect my family and me, but the Whites and their property if the riot spilled over to the Westside. The uprising continues over six days and remained in Watts and South-Central Black neighborhoods. The shopping center in that area was left with nothing but burned out buildings. It took years to bring it back to a semblance of what it was before.

Following the Watts Riots, similar racial incidents between Black citizens and the police took place. August 1988, as part of LAPD’s “Operation Hammer” drug sweeps, more than 80 officers tore apart a pair of apartment complexes, leaving dozens homeless. In January 1990, the LAPD and The Nation of Islam engaged in a violent encounter following a traffic stop resulting in the death of 27-year-old Air Force veteran Oliver Beasley. In 1991, Rodney King was chased by several cops while driving under the influence. His subsequent beating left him with a fractured skull and cheekbone and caught on video news cameras. The four officers were charged, but not convicted, except one for excessive force. The acquittal of these officers caused outrage, resulting in the Rodney King Riot. There were several days of destruction and physical violence, including deaths that spread throughout Southern California. President George H. W. Bush denounce the "senseless deaths" of the riots and police brutality. On my 41st birthday, May 2, 6,000 National Guards, 4,000 federal troops, and Marines, ended the uprising.

Over the years, many innocent unarmed Blacks have died at the hands of law enforcement, most receive no arrests, convictions, and continue to stay on the job. On May 25, 2020, 23 days after my 70th birthday, George Floyd, another such unarmed Black man, was murdered by cops. There are massive protests worldwide condemning police assaults and murders toward people of African descent. The protests have been going on for more than two weeks. This diverse outage, both here nation and abroad, are unlike any I have seen. I ask myself, will my grandchildren and their children finally see a real change and treated by the police, the same as Whites?