

A Divided Childhood: Black Youth in the Aftermath of the Watts Rebellion

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The Watts region of Los Angeles was once “an urban portal for the poorest and most recent migrants from the South” and a hotbed for “intense racial and class segregation.”¹ In the 1960s, nearly 70% of LA’s 650,000 African American residents lived substandard conditions in Watts.² In 1965, after decades of increasing resentment in the Black community, Watts became the setting of the “largest urban riot of the post-World War II era” in which tens of thousands of Black civilians demonstrated against racial discrimination.³ While the riot’s effects on the adult population of Watts have been thoroughly studied, its consequences on the region’s children have not received as much attention. By examining local children’s experiences and perceptions surrounding the incident, this paper argues that the youth of Watts were forced to endure heightened racial divisions in the aftermath of the riot. The contrasting reactions of the white and Black communities to the revolt support this argument; whites distanced themselves from Blacks by vilifying the African-Americans more broadly, while Blacks distanced themselves from whites by strengthening their racial pride.

Children growing up in Watts in the 1960s sensed a dismal economic future for themselves and for their community. The postwar economic boom that the preceding generation experienced had begun to unravel and reverse in the region, leaving 60s-era youth with meagre educational and professional opportunities.⁴ Unemployment rates in Watts were two to three times higher than those of neighbouring white communities due to racial discrimination and deindustrialization.⁵ The relocation of dozens of factories from Watts to suburban areas of Los Angeles contributed to growing unemployment; 28 factories, once reliable providers of jobs for many Watts residents, left the region from mid-1963 to mid-1964

¹ Donna Murch, “The Many Meanings of Watts: Black Power, Wattstax, and the Carceral State,” *OAH Magazine of History* 26, no. 1 (2012), 38.

² Elizabeth A. Wheeler, “More Than the Western Sky: Watts on Television, August 1965,” *Journal of Film and Video* 54, no. 2/3 (2002), 13.

³ David C. Carter, “The Music Has Gone Out of the Movement: Civil Rights and the Johnson Administration, 1965–1968,” *The Journal of American History* 97, no. 1 (2010), 256.

⁴ Josh Sides, “Black Community Transformation in the 1960s and 1970s,” *L.A. City Limits* (2019): 176.

⁵ Wheeler, “More Than the Western Sky,” 13.

alone.⁶ The quality and accessibility of public schools and career training in African American regions of Los Angeles were in steep decline as well.⁷ The combination of deteriorating educational quality and rising unemployment in Watts led its young residents to adopt a hopeless outlook of their future prospects. As they attended inadequate schools and witnessed their parents being ruthlessly laid off from no fault of their own, children were forced to grasp “the fruitlessness of playing by the rules.”⁸ As a discharged Watts factory worker testified at a California Senate hearing, “We have it so bad in some high schools ... they don’t show up to school because they don’t see no use working and going to school.”⁹ In addition to economic difficulties, children in 1960s Watts faced rampant abuse at the hands of the Los Angeles Police Department.

Los Angeles’s police force has strong historical roots in racial discrimination, and the Black children of Watts experienced their oppressive, violent practices firsthand. The LAPD used militarist strategies in Black neighbourhoods as a means of controlling and surveilling the community, and their forceful presence was felt disproportionately by the region of Watts.¹⁰ Police Chief William Parker promoted the notion that Black people were inherently criminal,¹¹ and used his “authoritarian” power to disrupt their lives with discriminatory, violent police tactics. In 1965, the LAPD carried out one arrest for every three reported incidents in the predominantly Black 77th Division, while in the white West Los Angeles Division, only in every ten reports resulted in arrest.¹² Unjust arrests were commonplace in Watts, and were at times targeted at minors. For instance, in 1961 a 17-year-old African American boy was arrested for riding a carnival ride without a ticket, resulting in a confrontation between 200 local onlookers and the police.¹³ From the perspective of Blacks, police-community relations were inequitable and atrocious. Unsurprisingly, the US Commission on Civil Rights discovered “widespread distrust of police among” African Americans in 1962.¹⁴ Consequently, Watts children were raised in a culture that feared and despised the LAPD and were themselves

⁶ Sides, “Black Community Transformation,” 180.

⁷ Sides, “Black Community Transformation,” 176.

⁸ Sides, “Black Community Transformation,” 181.

⁹ Sides, “Black Community Transformation,” 182.

¹⁰ Max Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles: Race, Resistance, and the Rise of the LAPD*, (University of North Carolina Pr., 2020), 19, 21.

¹¹ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 22.

¹² Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 23.

¹³ Sides, “Black Community Transformation,” 182.

¹⁴ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 24.

“conditioned in such a way that they [got] butterflies in their stomach when they [saw] a policeman.”¹⁵ In the summer of 1965, tension between the police force and the community of Watts reached a breaking point.

The Watts Rebellion was “six days of rage in August 1965.”¹⁶ In a 46 square mile area of Los Angeles, locals set fire to buildings, looted businesses and rioted fiercely against the police. The extremely forceful response of the LAPD escalated the situation, leading to mass violence and fatalities.¹⁷ The uprising was motivated by “a legacy of frustration with racism, employment discrimination, ... residential segregation” and oppressive policing practices,¹⁸ but was ultimately sparked by the arrest of Marquette Frye on August 11th by California Highway Patrol officer Lee Minikus.¹⁹ Frye and his brother were pulled over for suspected drunk driving in front of their mother’s home.²⁰ When Frye resisted arrest, a crowd of 250-300 local onlookers gathered and a “scuffle” ensued between the crowd and the police officers.²¹ More police arrived on the scene, which intensified the agitation of the crowd and thus the reactionary behaviour of the officers. Marquette, his brother and his mother were beat by the police as the crowd continued to grow in size and in energy. The officers perceived the crowd as a dangerous “mob” and indiscriminately arrested onlookers.²² Eventually, the Fries were forcibly shoved into patrol cars and the police retreated. The news of the incident travelled rapidly through the neighbourhood, “igniting the spark that set South Central aflame in open rebellion against the police.”²³ After three days of riots in which the LAPD felt they lacked sufficient control over the situation, three battalions of California National Guard troops were delivered to support the police in asserting power over the rioters.²⁴ The police force’s massive, violent reaction to the riots demonstrated their desire to maintain and increase their control over the streets and the residents of Watts.²⁵ Historians’ estimates of the number

¹⁵ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 71.

¹⁶ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 19.

¹⁷ Sides, “Black Community Transformation,” 174.

¹⁸ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 19.

¹⁹ William Boone, “Watts Rebellion of 1965,” in Molefi Kete Asante and Mambo Ama Mazama, *Encyclopedia of Black Studies* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2004): 475.

²⁰ Sides, “Black Community Transformation,” 174.

²¹ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 26.

²² Wheeler, “More Than the Western Sky,” 13.

²³ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 26.

²⁴ Gerald Horne, “Chapter 7: Iron Fist,” In *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), 159.

²⁵ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 20.

of Black participants in the riots range from 10,000 to 80,000.²⁶ There were an additional 934 LAPD officers, 719 sheriff's deputies and 13 900 California National Guard troops on the scene.²⁷

There are few reports of children's involvement and experiences in the Watts riot, however it is apparent that local youth directly experienced and, in some cases, participated in the terror and violence of the event. Over 500 minors were arrested throughout the uprising for petty crimes such as loitering and small theft.²⁸ Several sources claimed they witnessed children participating to various degrees in the rioting. One adult rioter claimed he saw police officers beating "little kids."²⁹ An independent Muslim newspaper published within weeks of the revolt included a photo of three policemen beating "an unarmed and totally subdued Negro teenager."³⁰ According to a KNXT television reporter, "young people, many of them boys only twelve and thirteen years old, stood along the curbs and rained their missiles on the KNXT camera car."³¹ Children in Watts who managed to avoid directly facing violence in the streets were not shielded from the turmoil, as the fires and chaos were visible and audible from their homes. Police officers arbitrarily shot into private residences "without any justification"³² – residences that could have contained children. In psychological interviews conducted with preschool-aged children within two days of the riot, young Watts residents described their perspectives of the event. One of these children said he saw a dead man on the street and a little girl with a broken arm. Another child described the sounds of shots firing and the scene of hordes of police officers pointing guns out of windows, stating that her father and brother were jailed during the riot and were yet to be released. Another young witness said that his house and possessions were burned by police, and yet another child admitted she "thought the whole world was burning" during the uprising.³³ With 34 casualties, 200 million dollars in resulting property damage, over 1,000 people injured and over 4,000 people jailed, the Watts rebellion touched the lives of every single young resident of the region, whether they

²⁶ Sides, "Black Community Transformation," 175; Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 38.

²⁷ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 32.

²⁸ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 30.

²⁹ Horne, "Iron Fist," 143.

³⁰ "Muhammad Speaks," *Muhammad Speaks* 4, no. 41 (Sept. 1965), 2.

³¹ Wheeler, "More Than the Western Sky," 16.

³² Horne, "Iron Fist," 141, 145.

³³ Ralph L. Dunlap, et al. "Young Children and the Watts Revolt," *Community Mental Health Journal* 4, no. 3 (1968), 205.

experienced the riots directly or through the arrest, death or injury of a loved one.³⁴ A resulting mass trauma lingered among the children of Watts as racial divides deepened in Los Angeles as a result of the uprising.

The most direct impact of the Watts rebellion on local children was the lasting personal trauma they experienced in its aftermath. Of the 107 four to five-year-old Black Watts children interviewed shortly after the riot, 92% said they were aware of the uprising and 47% expressed fear over the events that had occurred.³⁵ These violent and frightening experiences likely traumatized young children for decades. 25 years after the event, a former Watts resident who had participated in the riots in his youth shared that he continued to be “haunted by the searing image of two of my neighbours lying dead in the street, their bodies riddled with bullet wounds as young guardsmen stood over them.”³⁶ While it is difficult to track exactly how these fearful scenes affected youth throughout their lives, one can infer that such vivid trauma at a young age had a lasting impact on Watts children’s worldview. Examining the indirect effects of the riots on Watts’ young population provides hints as to how their perception of their identity and community was affected.

The riot’s effect on local youth can be extrapolated by examining its effect on Watts residents more broadly. The rebellion most strongly affected Watts children by leading them to grow up in a more racially divided culture, which is evidenced by the white and Black communities’ distinct reactions to the incident. It led to a white mainstream backlash against the Black population of Los Angeles, as is clearly demonstrated in the region’s post-Watts politics, white press coverage of the riots, and the increase of the power of the LAPD. 71% of whites surveyed soon after the rebellion believed the conflict had “increased the gap between the races,” and 79% expressed support for extremist LAPD Chief Parker.³⁷ On the other hand, the uprising brought the Black community together and led to a surge in anti-racist activism.

In the white mainstream press, rioters and, by extension, the Black community as a whole were intentionally vilified during and after the rebellion. The riot dominated the news for months; there were 606 articles about the event written in news outlets from August 12th

³⁴ Murch, “The Many Meanings of Watts,” 37.

³⁵ Dunlap et. al., “Young Children,” 204, 205.

³⁶ Horne, “Iron Fist,” 161.

³⁷ Ronald N. Jacobs, “The Watts Uprisings of 1965,” In *Race, Media, and the Crisis of Civil Society: From Watts to Rodney King* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 59.

to December 10th, 75% of which were featured in local LA outlets.³⁸ Overall, the white press successfully promoted an ‘us versus them’ approach in their portrayal of the riots.³⁹ The Los Angeles Times was especially conservative and sympathetic to the LAPD in its portrayal of the events.⁴⁰ It framed the riots as “an organized campaign of terror”⁴¹ and “the four ugliest days in our history,” claiming that “terrorism is spreading” and thus vilifying the Black community.⁴² The newspaper characterized LAPD Chief Parker and his police force as the heroes of the incident, insinuating that the Black rioters were entirely to blame for the resulting violence and damages.⁴³ The KNXT television network framed the event as a Black issue that necessitated an intense law and order response from the white power structure.⁴⁴ Black youth, in particular, were categorized by “the Los Angeles propaganda machine” as dangerous and in need of repression.⁴⁵ News coverage focused on capturing the violence and criminality of the riot rather than exploring the rioters’ grounds for discontent;⁴⁶ it viewed the riot as “random criminal chaos,” not political mobilization.⁴⁷ “Most whites willingly accepted this dominant narrative” in the press that antagonized Black people and “approved the use of force to quell the uprising.”⁴⁸ As a result, much of the white public increasingly viewed African Americans as inherently criminal, dangerous and needing powerful law enforcement,⁴⁹ causing much of the Black community to feel frustrated and victimized. These divisive racial narratives were quickly understood by Watts’ children as “the exposure of children to complexities and conflicts in the broad social environment is an inevitable consequence of mass communication media.”⁵⁰

A political shift to the right occurred among white voters after the Watts rebellion. In an election that centred around the issues of “crime, drugs, ... juvenile delinquency,” and

³⁸ Jacobs, “The Watts Uprisings,” 56.

³⁹ Wheeler, “More Than the Western Sky,” 13.

⁴⁰ Weena Perry, “‘An Outpost of Strength’: the Los Angeles Times Performs Law and Order versus Chaos during the Watts Rebellion of 1965,” *Afterimage* 33, no. 1 (2005), 34.

⁴¹ Horne, “Iron Fist,” 150.

⁴² Jacobs, “The Watts Uprisings,” 58.

⁴³ Jacobs, “The Watts Uprisings,” 59.

⁴⁴ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 29.

⁴⁵ Damien M. Sojoyner, *First Strike: Educational Enclosures in Black Los Angeles*, (University of Minnesota Press 2016), 127.

⁴⁶ Wheeler, “More Than the Western Sun,” 16.

⁴⁷ Wheeler, “More Than the Western Sun,” 11.

⁴⁸ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 34.

⁴⁹ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 20.

⁵⁰ Dunlap et. al., “Young Children,” 203.

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“racial problems,” Ronald Reagan won the Governorship of California in 1966,⁵¹ defeating “popular two-term incumbent” Pat Brown.⁵² In his eight years as governor running a moderate liberal platform, Pat Brown had achieved progress in anti-discrimination legislation on housing, employment, and welfare.⁵³ This legislative progress was crucial to developing poor, segregated regions such as Watts, but Reagan’s far-right platform strongly opposed such public assistance measures. Instead, Reagan’s successful campaign promoted increased policing and the criminalization of the Watts community. The “vicious political backlash against Watts” rioting led white voters to prioritize increased law and order tactics in Black communities, which strongly contributed to Reagan’s electoral success.⁵⁴ The uprising “intensified this groundswell of white conservatism” and heightened racial divides in Los Angeles.⁵⁵ Children of Watts were thus left to grow up in a political environment that fostered racial discrimination and heightened police power over Blacks. Due to their rising political skepticism of Black people, many white families moved out of Black communities after the rebellion.⁵⁶ As a result, Los Angeles schools became increasingly segregated, forcing the children of Watts to face even more racial isolation.⁵⁷ In addition, the rising political popularity of “law and order” empowered the LAPD to tighten its authoritarian grip over the residents of Watts.

As a backlash to the Watts rebellion, the LAPD increased its control of the African American population and extended its presence into virtually all areas of their lives.⁵⁸ Watts residents, already painfully familiar with discriminatory police practices, were forced to endure even greater discrimination as the LAPD’s “apparatus of coercive repression was ramped up in response to the Black urban riots.”⁵⁹ The force “expanded its intelligence apparatus in response to Watts ... they reacted by wanting to snoop around to know, beforehand, who the ‘troublemakers’ were.”⁶⁰ They invested in tons of new technology, including weaponry, helicopters, and raid gear, to exercise mass surveillance and control over Watts. By 1967, the

⁵¹ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 47.

⁵² M. Dallek, “Liberalism Overthrown the 1966 Gubernatorial Campaign in California Between Brown, Pat And Reagan, Ronald,” *American Heritage* 47, no. 6 (1996), 2.

⁵³ Dallek, “Liberalism Overthrown,” 3.

⁵⁴ Murch, “The Many Meanings of Watts,” 39.

⁵⁵ Sides, “Black Community Transformation,” 194.

⁵⁶ Sides, “Black Community Transformation,” 170.

⁵⁷ Sides, “Black Community Transformation,” 195.

⁵⁸ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 3.

⁵⁹ Sojoyner, *First Strike*, 72.

⁶⁰ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 141.

police force owned ten times as many shotguns as in 1965.⁶¹ The development of SWAT teams and the painting of address numbers on the roofs of public housing for airborne identification occurred as a backlash against the riots.⁶² Black Los Angeles residents also experienced a surge in police brutality in the weeks after the uprising. LAPD officers entered homes and businesses and assaulted their patrons, apparently “recovering loot” stolen during the riot.⁶³ For example, the predominantly Black West Side Social Club was raided, and its customers were beaten within weeks of the event.⁶⁴ The expansion of police presence in Watts “ensured daily contact between the criminal justice system and black and brown residents” of all ages, including children.⁶⁵ In fact, youth were arguably the principal victims of increased police power; by the late 1960s, the LAPD obsessed over their “need to have continual police surveillance on Black youth.”⁶⁶ As a result, juvenile arrest rates in Los Angeles increased each year from 1965 to 1969,⁶⁷ and educational systems were altered to facilitate greater police control over youth.

After the riot, public schools in Watts became the setting of intensified repression and segregation. White school officials and teachers increasingly perceived Black students as criminal and dangerous due to the vilification of the Black community in the press. Disciplinary approaches in school were thus significantly expanded. “In the late-1960s school systems began employing security staffs in order to deal with such student conduct far more aggressively and punitively.”⁶⁸ Police officers were hired by Los Angeles schools to enforce discipline and encourage law abidance.⁶⁹ Predictably, these new school-based police officers mirrored the tyrannical, discriminatory practices of the regular LAPD force. Surveillance cameras, metal detectors and advanced security systems were installed in Watts schools, bringing the mass surveillance of the streets into pedagogic institutions.⁷⁰ In addition, “city and school board officials and the LAPD developed a “Police in Government” course taught by LAPD officers.” Its curriculum and delivery belittled Black students and treated them as inherently criminal.⁷¹

⁶¹ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 52.

⁶² Horne, “Iron Fist,” 165.

⁶³ Horne, “Iron Fist,” 166.

⁶⁴ Horne, “Iron Fist,” 144.

⁶⁵ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 42.

⁶⁶ Sojoyner, *First Strike*, 36.

⁶⁷ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 106.

⁶⁸ Heather Ann Thompson, “Criminalizing Kids,” *Dissent* 58, no. 4 (2011), 24.

⁶⁹ Sojoyner, *First Strike*, 126.

⁷⁰ Thompson, “Criminalizing Kids,” 26.

⁷¹ Sojoyner, *First Strike*, 35.

After implementing school policing, Black Watts students began receiving criminal punishments or expulsions for simple misbehaviours such as skipping class or doodling.⁷² More students were expelled in the Los Angeles school district in the year after the uprising than ever before.⁷³ “All lived in fear of being patted down, hit by a wand, and even strip searched at the whim of school police personnel.”⁷⁴ Not all students personally received criminal punishments at school, but every child “suffered the daily humiliations, and hostile learning environments, that the post-1960s criminalization endured.”⁷⁵ Additionally, there was a general lack of investment in improving the quality of schooling in Watts. In the late sixties, young African American Angelenos “primarily attended old, decrepit schools that were so overcrowded that many still ran half-day sessions” and that lacked experienced teachers and essential services such as libraries and cafeterias.⁷⁶ Meanwhile, schools in white neighbourhoods “were new, spacious,” peaceful, and filled with experienced staff.⁷⁷ In post-rebellion Watts, the brutality and tyranny of new school policing programs and the growing educational disparity between white and Black regions indicated growing racial divides in Los Angeles that deeply affected the youth of Watts. The Black community of Watts as a whole, and the youth of Watts, in particular, responded to racial tension by furthering the Black Power movement.

The shared struggles of growing racial segregation and intensifying police practices among African Americans in the post-Watts era fostered a strong sense of solidarity in the neighbourhood. The Black community was bonded by their collective anger towards whites’ lack of acknowledgement of the inadequate conditions in Watts. The riots promoted the notion that “whites are devils” and led more Black people to become involved in anti-racist activism.⁷⁸ Black rage was directed towards Police Chief Parker, with his brazenly racist command of the LAPD.⁷⁹ Politically, the Watts rebellion was “crucial in galvanizing African-American opposition against Los Angeles Mayor Samuel Yorty, and ... central to” the eventual

⁷² Thompson, “Criminalizing Kids,” 25.

⁷³ Judith Kafka, “Chapter Four: Struggle for Control in the 1960s,” in *The History of “Zero Tolerance” in American Public Schooling* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 81.

⁷⁴ Thompson, “Criminalizing Kids,” 26.

⁷⁵ Thompson, “Criminalizing Kids,” 26.

⁷⁶ Kafka, “Struggle for Control,” 78.

⁷⁷ Kafka, “Struggle for Control,” 78.

⁷⁸ Horne, “Iron Fist,” 143.

⁷⁹ Horne, “Iron Fist,” 152.

victory of Black mayor Thomas Bradley in 1973.⁸⁰ It “nurtured a strong sense of community pride that reached its zenith in the Black Power and Black Arts movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s.”⁸¹ “The very destructiveness of the riot” helped to convince African Americans that their community had the power and the strength in numbers to induce change in the racial fabric of Los Angeles.⁸² Growing Black pride was showcased and celebrated in the annual Watts Summer Festival beginning in 1966.⁸³ The festival was highly successful in its first two years, with strong turnouts in all age groups of the Black community.⁸⁴ While the Black Power movement eventually led to decreased antipathy between whites and Blacks, it only fuelled racial divides direct following the rebellion, as it led to more potent racial identity politics on both sides. Youth were at the forefront of Black activism in the late 1960s, and thus directly experienced the increase in racial division.

Black youth activism flourished at high schools and universities after the Watts Rebellion. At high schools in Watts, Black students participated in protests and walkouts to raise awareness of the low educational quality and unfair disciplinary practices that disproportionately affected their neighbourhood.⁸⁵ Student demonstrations in the aftermath of the uprising were “unusually large and widespread” – walkouts occurred in at least three dozen South Central schools in the late sixties.⁸⁶ For instance, in October 1967, approximately half the students at Manual Arts High School in Watts participated in a walkout in an effort to cause the termination of their racist school principal.⁸⁷ Young activists broadly called for “a greater respect for the concerns” of their community.⁸⁸ “While many of the protestors’ demands were not new,” the riots had “transformed the political contours of Los Angeles and its school district,” causing heightened racial tension and thus heightened desire for change among Black youth.⁸⁹ Young activists acknowledged that newfound “racial pride” derived from the riots motivated their efforts,⁹⁰ which further demonstrates the intensified racial

⁸⁰ Jacobs, “The Watts Uprisings,” 54.

⁸¹ Murch, “The Many Meanings of Watts,” 37.

⁸² Sides, “Black Community Transformation,” 170.

⁸³ Bruce M. Tyler, “The Rise and Decline of the Watts Summer Festival, 1965 to 1986,” *American Studies* 31, no. 2 (1990), 62.

⁸⁴ Tyler, “The Rise and Decline,” 73.

⁸⁵ Kafka, “Struggle for Control,” 77.

⁸⁶ Kafka, “Struggle for Control,” 82.

⁸⁷ Kafka, “Struggle for Control,” 85.

⁸⁸ Kafka, “Struggle for Control,” 79.

⁸⁹ Kafka, “Struggle for Control,” 79.

⁹⁰ Kafka, “Struggle for Control,” 83.

divides in Los Angeles after the rebellion. At Californian universities, similar Black pride movements took shape. African American students from Los Angeles founded the Black Student Union (BSU) at Stanford University in 1967. At a 1968 public forum at Stanford, BSU members interrupted the university president's speech, seized the microphone and assumed control over the remainder of the event to share a list of proposed improvements for the institution.⁹¹ The suggested improvements were focused on better welcoming African Americans to Stanford, and included the hiring of more Black staff and faculty and the foundation of a Black Studies department.⁹² Another noteworthy example of Black youth activism in universities after the riots was the San Francisco University student takeover in the 1968/69 academic year.⁹³ Increasing racial pride and activist mobilization among African American youth after the Watts uprising gave them a stronger sense of racial identity, which further distanced Black youth from white culture and thus contributed to the increasing racial divides of the post-riot era.

After the Watts Rebellion, some efforts were made on both private and public levels to decrease poverty and discrimination in the African American community. Ultimately, though, these efforts failed and only further exposed and increased Blacks' cultural, political and economic separation from whites. War on Poverty programs that were implemented in Watts did very little to increase prosperity and employment in the neighbourhood;⁹⁴ in 1967, two years after the riot, 42% of male Watts residents were still unemployed. A mere few hundred jobs were made available as a result of public War on Poverty programs in Watts, which were not nearly enough to substantially improve economic conditions.⁹⁵ Public and private employment and job training programs were "doomed to fail" due to their failure to address and solve the systematic discrimination against Blacks in the workforce.⁹⁶ Instead of improving conditions in Watts, these unsuccessful programs brewed disillusionment and resentment towards white power structures. This resentment further distanced the Black community from white Los Angeles.

⁹¹ Sojoyner, *First Strike*, 130.

⁹² Sojoyner, *First Strike*, 131.

⁹³ Sojoyner, *First Strike*, 132.

⁹⁴ Tyler, "The Rise and Decline," 65.

⁹⁵ Donald Wheeldin, "The Situation in Watts Today," *Freedomways* 9, no. 4, (Jan. 1969), 55.

⁹⁶ Wheeldin, "The Situation in Watts Today," 57.

The Watts Rebellion of 1965 led to heightened racial divides between Black and white Los Angeles residents, and children directly experienced this intensified segregation. The Black community of Watts and the white community of greater Los Angeles grew apart in the late sixties due to increased police power, a surge in white conservatism, discriminatory mainstream press coverage, the rise of Black pride and the failure of anti-poverty programs. The Black youth of Watts were thus forced to endure an increasingly divisive culture in which their schools, activism efforts and future outlooks were shaped and defined by racial divides.

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