What effect did the Los Angeles riots have on the perceptions of young African American males regarding their future while confined to a penal institution?

David Michael Petway
WHAT EFFECT DID THE LOS ANGELES RIOTS HAVE ON THE
PERCEPTIONS OF YOUNG AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES REGARDING THEIR
FUTURE WHILE CONFINED TO A PENAL INSTITUTION?

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master
of
Social Work

By
David Michael Petway
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ABSTRACT

This is a qualitative study of incarcerated African American males perceptions of the future. Future is defined in terms of Education, Economics and Employment, and the Criminal Justice System. The purpose of this study is to determine the effect of the Los Angeles riots on inmates who maintained family connections and residential status in South Central Los Angeles prior to their convictions.

The study was conducted at Heman G. Stark Youth Training School, an institution within the California Youth Authority system. A sample of twenty African American males, ranging in ages 19 - 23, were randomly chosen. Respondents were chosen from a population of 431 wards from the South Central Los Angeles area.

Data were collected by face-to-face interviews and analyzed using open coding methodology. This research addresses the social work practice role of community intervention and administration/policy and planning issues.
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INTRODUCTION

After the Los Angeles riots of 1992, there were numerous articles written, television interviews and commentaries exploring the possible causality of the riots. Experts eagerly filled the media with their quick fix intervention strategies for the victims and for the community at large, in the hope that their strategies would preclude those horrific events from resurfacing. The world watched as looters and participants in the riots pillaged and burned Los Angeles leaving many homeless, jobless, and without a sense of hope. Residents of South Central Los Angeles were asked questions by various television personalities about their feelings, about how they were personally effected, and their perceptions of the future. Some shook their heads with uncertainty when asked about the future, others grimaced with animosity while sweeping debris from the portals of their badly damaged business establishments.

Little, if any, attention is given to the many men and women who were confined to penal institutions during the riots, many of whom maintains family and residences in South Central Los Angeles. Participants in this study are youthful offenders in the California Youth Authority system,
ranging in ages 18-25. The wards resided in the South Central Los Angeles area prior to their conviction.

What effect did the riots have on this group? Did the riots change their perceptions of the future? Are inmates optimistic about life after prison or has prison life, given the current economic and social conditions, become a viable option?

The current economic and social conditions in the U.S. today is causing policy-makers to redress the out of control criminal justice system. The proliferation of the correction aspect of the system has created a massive tax burden on American citizens who are constantly calling for reform. An indepth study of how inmates view their future is important because the results from such a study will provide policy-makers and program directors of correctional facilities with information to be used when developing programs aimed at reducing or eliminating recidivism rates at their institutions.

The study explores incarcerated African American males feelings about the riots and their perceptions of the future. The study was conducted at the Heman G. Stark youth Training School in Chino, California, a penal institution in the California Youth Authority system. The population at the Youth Training school (Y.T.S.) fluctuates
between 1600 to 1800 wards (inmates). Approximately eighty percent of this population comes from Los Angeles County. Many of the wards are from the South Central Los Angeles area.

This research project adopts a positivist exploratory methodology and analysis. "The basic belief system of positivism is rooted in a realist ontology, that is, the belief that there exists a reality out there, driven by immutable natural laws" (Guba, 1989). This exploratory approach allows the researcher to ask basic questions on various themes of interest, while exploring a topic. The rigid guidelines of survey research using questionnaires would not permit such inquiry. The most feasible research method for this study is the positivist exploratory method primarily because of its flexibility and its investigative qualities.

This research project addresses the social work practice role of community intervention. Here, the social worker is an organizer, empowering the community to take control of their neighborhoods and to demand from their government, local, state and federal, better services.

There seems to be a correlation between poorly funded schools, a lack or recreational activities and employment opportunities, with the rate of juvenile delinquency, crime
rates, and high school drop-out rates in urban areas among African Americans males. As an organizer, the social worker can assist the community in developing programs that provide recreation for its youth and realistic job training for those who are employable. As with other communities, recreation and employment serves as preventive measures to keep youth from delinquent activities. Recreation and employment opportunities can also serve to prevent delinquency in the African American communities. To have these social elements functioning in a community, there has to be a strong tax base and political influence.

Examples of successful communities are those with a strong tax base and political influence (e.g. Beverly Hills, Westwood, San Dimas, Diamond Bar, etc.). These communities insist on having prevention programs instituted to steer juveniles away from delinquent behavior. Many types of recreational activities are created to engage the young person, particularly the young males to channel that energy toward productive ends.

There is also a strong emphasis on high academic standards. Therefore, money is funnelled into the education system to hire highly skilled teachers who use state of the art teaching tools to ensure that their students understand the academic as well as the practical implications of their
education. The social and familial environments in which an adolescent has to function, influences, to a great extent, his or her social, educational, and occupational functioning which has a significant impact on them later in life.

Currently, there is a high rate of young African American males confined to penal institutions in California. Most of these wards are from areas which lack resources necessary to foster a healthy and safe environment. As with the aforementioned communities, success could also be obtained in the African American community, particularly if there were high educational standards, employment opportunities, and recreation secured and functioning in the community. With these social elements in place, there would probably be a reduction of young African American males confined to penal institutions, thereby creating less of an economic burden on society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite the harsh conditions of slavery and the crippling legacy it has on the posterity of the African American community, historically, African Americans have always envisioned a brighter tomorrow. Though disenfranchised for the political process, barred from
educational institutions and totally lacking economic development, African Americans have shown resilience in overcoming these enormous circumstances. Realizing the value of education, "Blacks have taken advantage of every opportunity offered them to be educated. South and North, Blacks learned through the benevolence of slave mistress and their children, from abolitionist, Quakers, and Catholics. Blacks have always understood that it was necessary to learn in spite of opposition and by any means necessary." (Wilson; 1989). Many African Americans believe that education is the gateway to all social segments of society including enfranchisement and economic parity.

The tremendous gains of the 1950's and 1960's Civil Rights Movement seemed to have ignited the rocket that would eventually launch the African American community into the long waited social arenas of politics and economics. President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty Program was designed to create the "Great Society" which sought to "rid" America of its ugly social diseases.

From his efforts, federally funded programs developed in deprived communities across America, aimed at improving employment skills of able bodied young men and women. These programs assisted the African American community in a positive way, giving hope filled with an optimistic future.
With the Vietnam War and the massive build up of the military industrial complex, lawmakers drastically cut social spending. Those programs, which rose to prominence in the late 1960's and into the 1970's, were nearing their tragic end. The ascendancy of Ronald Reagan with his supply-side economic policies, set in motion the vehicle that would halt the economic advancement of the African American community as well as other poor communities in the country.

Under the Reagan Administration, the government proposed combining the Summer Youth Employment and Training Program with the Youth Community Conservation and Improvement Projects and the Summer Youth Employment Program, and to seek authority to reduce outlays on these three programs in 1982 by 20 percent (OMB; 1981). Programs that provided economically disadvantage persons some type of employment, like the Comprehensive Education Training Act (CETA) and the Public Service Employment programs, were phased out (OMB, 1986a).

The domestic policies of the Reagan/Bush administrations seem to have tarnished the economic and social advancement of the African American community. In response, one could view the recent Los Angeles riots as an act of frustration with the system, a political statement,
or the beginning of a community’s attempt to make some drastic social changes.

**Citizenry Response to the Riots**

Students at Westchester High in Inglewood, primarily a black, lower-to-middle class community, gave their opinions of the riots in an interview with Mark Mitchell, a Los Angeles Marriage, Family and Child therapist. The students, according to Mitchell, are angry at the chaos, angry at the adults for not taking charge, and angry at the racism they experience. Some of the students are glad the riots happened. A few said they joined in and enjoyed it, saying, "We had no hope, so what else are we going to do"? (Networker, 1992).

The 600,000 people who inhabit the 25 square mile area known as South Central Los Angeles have no movie theaters, no bowling alleys, no supermarkets and few mental health services. "The mental health system has essentially been dismantled, first by the Reagan and Bush federal cuts, and now by Governors Dukemejian and Wilson", says Leonore Guevara of Kaiser Permanete Watts Counseling and Learning Center (July, 1992). In his article, "Los Angeles Aftermath", Larry Letich claims that "the riots may have
been less shocking to those living in the heart of South Central than to the rich white communities in the surrounding area. The riots, he contends, seem to dramatically affirm for those in the riot areas, who saw the world as a hopeless and dangerous place" (Letich, 1992).

To help relieve the tension felt by many in the community, the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) School of Social Welfare organized a call-in with the help of KCET-TV, the Los Angeles public television station for callers to discuss the riots. There were representatives from the white, hispanic, African American and Korean communities, serving as volunteer social workers.

Although each major ethnic group had professional representation in the ten day program, it was not uncommon for a white racist to be talking to a black social worker, or for an angry African American to a white or Korean social worker (Letich, 1992).

Worldwide Observation of the Riots

The events of Los Angeles not only drew local and national attention, but viewers from around the globe watched via satellite as one of America’s premier cities ignited into flames. As they watched, they also gave
critical analysis of our judicial system as well as monitored the treatment of American's least favorite population. "In a USA Today opinion poll conducted on April 30, 1992, 81 percent of blacks and 36 percent of whites believe the court system is biased against blacks. A second poll conducted on ABC TV News and the Washington Post found that 78 percent of blacks and 25 percent of whites agreed with the statement that the acquittal shows that blacks cannot get justice in this country" (Wen,1992).

Americans received world wide criticism for the acquittal of Los Angeles policemen accused of beating motorist Rodney King. Apparently, the message of freedom, justice, and equality, key components of a democratic society, which American preaches abroad, is not being put into practice here. The following nations had this to say about the riot situation in Los Angeles, and the United States present judicial system in treatment of African Americans. These excerpt were taken from an article entitled, "Riots Call Judicial System into Question" written by Zong Wen of the "Beijing Review" May 11-17, 1992. "World opinion deplores the out break of violence and regards it as closely related with the deep-rooted racial discrimination in the American society. French President Francois Mitterrand blamed the racial violence partially for
an absence of social legislation and protection. He described the acquittal as unbearable and a scandalous decision. Japan Tokyo Shimbun commented that the racial confrontation today reminded one of the scenes back in the 1960's. Philippine newspaper noted that although Americans are lecturing human rights to others, there are no human rights in their own country. The Hindustan Times Of India pointed out that the rioting must be embarrassing to Washington, which tends to threaten third world countries of linking aid with their human rights record" (Wen;1992).

Los Angeles: A Historical Perspective

The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) has a long history of abusive behavior in the African American community. In fact the incident which sparked the Watts Riots of 1965 involved police officers. Although the catalyst were California Highway Patrolmen, the rapport and presence of the LAPD in the African American community during that time period parallels with present times. In 1964, citizen from the African American community in Los Angeles filed complaints against the Los Angeles Police Department. "The McConne investigators discovered, citizens filed 412 complaints of police misconduct. Of these, 42
complaints relating to misconduct in contact with citizens were found to have merit following investigations. The charge involved 10 for use of excessive force, 23 for discourtesy or profanity, and nine for unlawful arrest or unreasonable search....

In addition, 470 officers--or slightly less than 10 percent of the force--were handed various disciplinary measures (most of which related to actions not necessarily involving citizens). More than 70 cases of alleged police brutality were referred to the Mccone investigating committee during the probe and were passed on to the appropriate and responsible agencies." (Crump,1966).

Today, residents of Los Angeles in the African American community continues to receive abusive treatment by LAPD. Consistent with conditions in the 1960's, African American have filed numerous complaints and have received little results. "The abuse of force by police has been a serious social problem. Since 1988, about 100 US policemen have been brought to trial because of their misconduct in performing duty, yet cases of police misconduct continue to be reported at a growing number. A special investigation committee found out last year that in Los Angeles alone, 200 policemen were racially biased and prone to over-using violence when performing duty. Many of them,
however, continue to be appreciated and promoted by their superiors" (Wen; 1992).

The participants in this study come from an environment where police violence is rampant. They face a biased criminal justice system and a substandard education system where there is the ever present threat of a teachers strike. They face catastrophic unemployment rates, substandard housing conditions, and few if any, recreation activities. All of the participants are projected to be paroled back into the South Central Los Angeles area. Given these depressive social conditions, it would be difficult for one to have an optimistic outlook for the future.

African Americans and the Criminal Justice System

The plight of African American males in this society and their involvement with the Criminal Justice System seems to worsen as the years progress. "Many people may be unaware, however, that not only has the prison system gotten bigger, but is also has gotten blacker. Analyses of national prison statistics for 1973 and 1979 reveals that the number of blacks in state correctional institutions increased from about 83,000 to about 132,000, and that the
black share of state prison population rose from about 46.4 percent to 47.8 percent. Considering that blacks account for a minority of the total United States population—an estimated 11.5 percent in 1976—this over representation is very striking, indeed. Whereas the incarceration rate for whites increased from about 46.3 per 100,000 to about 65.1 from 1973 to 1979, the black incarceration rate rose from about 368 to 544.1 per 100,000 during that period" (Christianson, 1981).

The above study shows, in glaring form, the increase of African American presence in correctional institutions from 1973 to 1979. Currently, the statistics are even more alarming for African Americans, particularly for young African American males. As more and more prisons and jails are built, they are being filled with young African American males. "The U.S. 'criminal justice' system is the largest in the world. In mid-year 1991, there were over 804,000 people in U.S. prisons, over 405,000 in jails, and more than 4.4 million people—or almost 2 percent of the U.S. population—who were under some form of criminal justice control (including prison, jail, probation, or parole)" (Whitman, 1992).

Disproportionate to their numbers, African Americans make up a large percentage of the prison and jail
populations. The following statistics indicate African American males involvement with the Criminal Justice System. These statistics are provided by The Sentencing Project which is an independent organization operating out of Washington D.C. Whitman (1992) reports:

"a Black person in the U.S. is 7.4 times more likely to be imprisoned than a White person;

one out of every two Black men will be arrested in his lifetime;

there are more Black men aged 20 - 29 who are under the control of the Criminal Justice System than there are Black men in college;

one out of every four Black men are under some form of criminal justice control.

more than 3 percent of all Black men are in prison (this means only prison, and does not include any of the other criminal justice categories);

one out of every four Black men will go to prison at some point in his life (only refers to prison)" (Whitman 1992 p. 212).

The future of the Criminal Justice System, with regards to African Americans, is discouraging. More emphasis is being placed on crime control, tougher and longer sentencing practices as oppose to preventive measures such as education and job development. The following are examples of the sentiments of many Americans regarding the Criminal Justice System as provided by Georges-Abeyie (1984). "This apparent American obsession with crime, and fear of crime and
criminal victimization has been translated into repressive suggestions for reform of the American criminal justice process and the ever increasing demand, especially by whites, for greater severity in the treatment of criminals. These concerns, fears, reforms, and "insights" can be summarized as follows:

(1) the majority of white Americans sampled favor capital punishment (Flanagan and Mcleod, 1983:264)

(2) the majority of white Americans believe that judges should have the right to prohibit newspapers from printing information about certain criminal cases (Hindelang, Gottfredson, Flanagan 1982: 182);

(3) 53 percent of Americans believe that the press and the public should be excluded from some trials although the U.S. Constitution says that court trails should be public (Hindelgang, Gottfredson, Flanagan, 1982: 182);

(4) the majority of Americans approve of a policeman's right to strike a citizen under certain circumstances.

(5) only 25 percent of the American public has "a great deal" of confidence in the U.S. Supreme Court (Flanagan and McLeod, 1982: 246-247);
(6) 83 percent of the U.S. public believe that the courts, in general, in their own area, do not deal harshly enough with criminals (Flanagan and McLeod, 1982: 248-249)" (Georges-Abeyie, 1984 p. 338).

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This is an exploratory study which intends to discover the effects, if any, of the Los Angeles riots on the perceptions of the future of young African American male inmates. The research method used for this study is positivist exploratory. This method was chosen primarily because of its qualitative aspects in investigating any significant changes in African American perceptions of the future, both positive and negative resulting from the riots. By using a qualitative approach, it will allow those who are incarcerated an opportunity to provide their own perceptions rather than using a formulated instrument with questions to be answered without the input of those who were affected.

This research method does not lend itself to hypothesis testing. Hypotheses suggests "expectations about the nature of things derived from a theory" (Rubin and Babbie, 1989, p. G 3). There are no expectations or assumptions about this study to be made. Data collection using this approach,
then, is to explore the subject area and discover.

**Research Question**

The research question is: What effect did the Los Angeles riots have on the perceptions of young African American males regarding their future while confined to a penal institution? Perceptions of the future will be addressed in terms of the education system, economics and employment, and the criminal justice system.

**Sampling**

Heman G. Stark Youth Training School has a large population of youthful offenders from the South Central Los Angeles area. Wards, in most cases, can be confined in the Youth Authority system up until the age of 25. In this study, twenty African American male wards ranging in ages 19 to 23 were chosen by random sampling. Of the twenty, fifteen were actually interviewed. Two of the twenty were paroled before the interviews were conducted. The remaining three wards had academic and or vocational trade schedules which conflicted with the researcher.
Wards chosen for this research project were randomly selected from a list of wards compiled from the area affected by the riots, typically referred to as "South Central. This list was generated by the Youth Authority Data Processing Division in Sacramento, California and were electronically transmitted to the data processing office at Heman G. Stark Youth Training School. Wards participating in the study are residents of South Central which includes: Jeffersons, Watts, portions of Long Beach, Compton, the Gang Project, and Los Angeles. The wards will be paroled or released back to their respective areas when confinement time ends.

The number of incarcerated African American wards from the riot area totals 431. Each ward was listed by his Youth Authority (YA) number. A YA number is a five digit number which serves to identify wards in the system. Wards convicted under superior court or tried as an adult, if under age, are sometimes housed in a YA facility and are issued an alpha character and four digit number for identification. From a print out generated by data processing, twenty of the 431 wards were randomly chosen by YA numbers.

This sample was chosen primarily because of the respondents' permanent home addresses and the relationships
they maintain with the survivors of the riots. The time allotted for completion of this research project made it impossible for a large number of wards to be interviewed. Therefore, a sample size of twenty wards adequately fit the time frame.

Data Collection and Instrument

Each respondent was interviewed for approximately one hour and was asked open-ended questions regarding their outlook of the future. Subjects were also asked to elaborate on whether or not the riots had a negative or positive impact on their perceptions of the future. Perceptions of the future was focused in the areas of education, employment, and the Criminal Justice System. Sixteen questions using a critical incidence approach were used which focused on the three aforementioned subject areas.

Data were collected by note taking and with the use of a tape recorder. Respondents were asked questions and their responses were recorded. Note taking was used to capture the setting of the interview, recording the respondents' affect, behavior, and other visual data. The tape recorder was used to ensure the accuracy of the respondents' comments.
Respondents were asked questions using critical incident techniques. Critical incident technique is "A procedure used for gathering certain important facts concerning behavior in defined situations...It does not consist of a single rigid set of rules governing such data collection, rather it is a flexible set of principles which must be modified and adapted to meet the specific situation at hand" (Flanagan, 1954 p. 335). In this study, respondents were asked to describe their feelings on various topics, including the impact of the riots, their education experiences, employment outlook, and the Criminal Justice System.

**Strengths and Limitations of Study**

The strength of this method is that it allows participants to give their account of events by answering open-ended questions. Open-ended questioning is not as restricting as a questionnaire used in survey research. With survey research the participants have to adhere to a prescribed set of questions which usually do not allow respondents to expound on areas which raises other questions. In this method, however, the respondent is given the freedom to elaborate on the questions asked which allows
the researcher to get a good understanding of the problem being investigated.

Limitations to this research method includes not being able to interview large numbers of participants which allows diversity of perception. Another limitation is that the findings cannot be generalized.

RESULTS

TABLE 1 - PERSONAL INFORMATION

Table 1 provide information about respondents' age, marital status, number of children, number of siblings, and the person or persons who they were raised by.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>MARITAL STATUS</th>
<th>NO. OF CHILDREN</th>
<th>RAISED BY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-0</td>
<td>Single - 1</td>
<td>0 = 12</td>
<td>Mother = 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-6</td>
<td>Married - 0</td>
<td>1 = 1</td>
<td>Father = 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-5</td>
<td>Divorce- 0</td>
<td>2 = 2</td>
<td>Both = 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-1</td>
<td>Separat- 0</td>
<td></td>
<td>Relativ= 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Rel= 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

23-3    NO. OF SIBLINGS
24-0    Mean = 5.13
25-0    Range= 1-10

Mean age = 20.26
Range = 19-23
TABLE 2 - SOCIAL INFORMATION

Table 2 provide information about respondents' education level, the age when they were first incarcerated, gang affiliations, and the number of years lived in the Los Angeles area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YRS LIVED IN L.A.</th>
<th>EDUC LEVEL</th>
<th>NO. JOBS</th>
<th>GANGS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M = 18.80 yrs</td>
<td>M = 11.73 yrs</td>
<td>0 = 9</td>
<td>YES = 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R = 8 -23</td>
<td>R = 10-14</td>
<td>1 = 3</td>
<td>No = 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 = 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 = 0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 3 - LEGAL HISTORY

Table 3 provide information about respondents' employment history in terms of number of jobs held, number of times incarcerated, and the date when confinement time ends.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE 1st INCAR</th>
<th>NO. TIMES INCAR</th>
<th>DATE CONFIN. ENDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M = 14.13 yrs</td>
<td>M = 3.53</td>
<td>1993 = 2 1997 = 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R = 8-23</td>
<td>R = 1-15</td>
<td>1994 = 6 1998 = 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1995 = 1 1999 = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1996 = 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Demographic information was gathered to determine if differences in individual, familial, or environmental factors played a part in how one perceives the future. The demographic data indicates that the population is basically a homogenous group with similar life experiences. It is popularly believed by society that the young African
American male who finds himself in destructive behaviors (i.e. gangs, drug abuse, and violent crimes) comes from a family headed by a single female. In this study, about half of the respondents were raised by both parents, with the father participating equally in the raising of his son.

Also contrary to popular thought is that young African American males are fathering children and are not being responsible for them. This sample indicates that an overwhelming majority of respondents (12) are not fathers. The total number of children fathered by the respondents is three (3). Although they are not fathers, the respondents tend to come from large families—the mean family size is 5.13 siblings with a range of 1 - 10.

**TABLE 4 - RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS**

Table 4 provides a list of open-ended questions with the participants' responses. Responses were categorized and the number of words per category is indicated to the right of a category's title (i.e. No impact N = 5).

(2) When you were watching the LA riots on T.V., what impact did you think it would have on your future?

- a. No impact N = 5
- b. Make future more difficult N = 4
- c. Devastated/Feel hopeless N = 2
- d. Things would change N = 4
2a) Why did you feel that way?
   a. Didn’t matter/more time remaining  N = 5
   b. An inconvenience in the community  N = 4
   c. No employment opportunities  N = 2

(3) As you think of the L.A. riots now, how do you think they affect your future?
   a. Will not affect future  N = 6
   b. Harder to find work  N = 3
   c. Facing society’s stereotypes of Blacks  N = 4
   d. Other  N = 2

(3a) Why do you feel this way?
   a. Making preparations now for future  N = 2
   b. Criminal record/Skin color  N = 5
   c. Bad economic conditions  N = 2
   d. Other  N = 6

(4) Regarding your educational experience, think of a time when you had a good experience in school. When was it?
   a. Private school/Elementary school age  N = 7
   b. Jr. High, High school/Graduation  N = 8

(4a) Describe it.
   a. Lot of discipline/good curriculum  N = 3
   b. Sense of accomplishment  N = 7
   c. Teachers were willing to help  N = 5

25
(5) Think of a time when you had a bad experience in school. When was it?
   a. Jr. High/Public school system  N = 9
   b. High school  N = 5
   c. Other  N = 1

(5a) Describe it.
   a. Dispute with teachers  N = 4
   b. Gang violence  N = 7
   c. Teachers not willing to help  N = 2
   d. Other  N = 2

(6) Do you feel the education system in your community had a positive or negative impact on your life?
   a. Positive  N = 7
   b. Negative  N = 6
   c. Other  N = 2

(6a) Why do you feel that way?
   a. Social promotion/teachers don't teach  N = 6
   b. Good system/teachers helpful  N = 7
   c. Other  N = 2

(7) Describe the feelings you now have about education.
   a. It's needed for a successful life  N = 14
   b. Other  N = 1

(7a) Do you feel that it will affect your future?
   a. Yes  N = 14
   b. No  N = 1

26
(7b) Why do you feel this way?
   a. Help you get ahead in life  N = 14
   b. It doesn’t matter  N = 1

(8) What do you think of the Criminal Justice System.
   a. The is corrupted and crooked  N = 11
      (The police and lawyers are involved in criminal activities).
   b. A biased system  N = 4

(9) Regarding the Criminal Justice System, do you feel that you were discriminated against because of your ethnicity?
   a. Yes  N = 3
   b. No  N = 12

(9a) Why do you feel this way?
   a. Did the crime, doing the time  N = 12
   b. Victim was of a different race  N = 2
   c. Other  N = 1

(10) Describe how you see the presence of the police in community.
   a. Misusing their power and authority  N = 9
   b. No integrity  N = 4
   c. Useful, doing their jobs  N = 2

(11) Do you feel that black males are treated differently by the police than any other ethnic group?
   a. Yes  N = 14
   b. No  N = 1
(11a) Why do you feel this way?

a. Society's view of black men (dope dealers, street hustlers thieves, and gang bangers) N = 10
b. They seem to be anti-black N = 2
c. Fear of black domination N = 2
d. Other N = 1

(12) Do you feel that the Criminal Justice System will be more positive towards African Americans in the future, will remain the same, or get worse?

a. Will be more positive N = 3
b. Remain the same N = 4
c. Get worse N = 7
d. Other N = 1

(12a) Why do you feel this way?

a. Blacks rising up demanding better justice N = 7
b. No change in the structure of the system N = 2
c. Harder and longer sentences for blacks N = 4
d. Other N = 2

(13) Describe how you feel about your chances of getting a job when you are released?

a. Good N = 9
b. Poor N = 5
c. Other N = 1

(13a) Why do you feel this way?

a. Acquired skills (vocational and academic training) N = 3
b. Self determination/support systems N = 6

c. Unprepared N = 4

d. Other N = 2

(14) Do you feel that the skills you have received while incarcerated has adequately prepared you for employment when you are released?
   a. Yes N = 9
   b. No N = 6

(14a) Why do you feel this way?
   a. learned vocational, academic and problem solving skills N = 7
   b. Learned how to present myself N = 4
   c. Trades not compatible with job market N = 1
   d. Didn’t receive any training N = 3

(15) Do you think that the riots will have an affect on your employment opportunities when you are released?
   a. Yes N = 8
   b. No N = 7

(15a) Why do you feel this way?
   a. Loss businesses and bad economic conditions N = 5
   b. Society’s view of African Americans N = 3
   c. Continue criminal activity N = 1
   d. Possible job offer/individual’s will N = 6

(16) What do you think were the causes of the riots?
   a. Maltreatment of blacks over the years/build up N = 9
   b. Rodney King beating and verdict of police
DISCUSSION

Data were analyzed using open coding procedures. Participants were asked a series of questions and their responses were recorded and compared. Coding was done by paragraphs, whereas the major idea from each participants' response were brought forward. Once the idea for each question was established, categories were formulated based on the similarities of each participants response. These categories fell on a continuum of having positive or negative experiences.

The majority of questions (9) had a total of four categories of responses each. The remaining six questions were basically (yes) and (no) responses. From these categories, the number of responses in the population, (represented by \( N = \)) fell into one of the categories for each question asked. These numbers were totaled to provide the answer to the research question.

In answering the research question: What effect did the Los Angeles riots have on African Americans perception of the future while confined to a penal institution?, the results indicates that the riots did not effect respondents'
perception of the future. The results do, however, indicate that respondents are aware of the devastation the riots had on their community but feel, for the most part, that they are able to rise above those circumstances.

One would imagine, given the failing economic, social, and political conditions in our society, that the plight of inmates being released back into society would be anything but favorable, particularly for the African American male. Statistics shows that African American youth, in the areas of education, employment, and rates of incarceration, fare far worse than their white counter parts.

In discussing the results from this study, two theories will be viewed in order to help bring clarity and possibly understanding to these findings. The first is the "Locus of Control" theory (Rotter, 1966) which states that "Individual differences exist with respect to a person's belief in the way his or her behavior will affect the control of life events. The individual who views events such as job success or educational achievement as a result of his or her actions, or within his or her control, is said to have a belief in an internal control over life. Conversely, the individual who views similar life events as independent of his or her own actions and more dependent on luck, fate, chance or powerful others is said to have a belief in
external control over life" (Szilagyi, Sans, and Keller, 1976: 262). The theory goes on to say that internally oriented people are more likely to be successful in employment and in his or her educational attainment (p. 173).

The other theory, or model, used in understanding the individual is the social-ecological or interactive model. Factors that are taken into account in this model include culture, economics, social, educational, and psychological. Chestang's (1983) model, as discussed by (Allen-Meares, 1990), has two environments—"the nurturing environment (family, friends, supportive institutions, values, traditions, and identity) and the sustaining environment (goods, services, political power, economic resources, education, and status). According to Chestang, when the sustaining environment does not permit equal access to political and economic power, the condition that results for the individual or group is characterized by social injustices, unfairness, inequality, denial of legal rights, use of double standards for white and black people, and personal impotence because of the externally imposed inability to remove any of the preceding conditions" (Allen-Meares, 1990 p. 284-285).
In reviewing the above theories in the context of this study, this researcher concludes that the majority of respondents have an internal locus of control. But locus of control is also affected by social-ecological factors. The respondents attribute their optimism for the future to the acquired knowledge and skills they have received while confined (i.e. vocational, technical and academic achievement) and self determination indicating that one can achieve whatever one desires. Internals, according to the theory, "are able to take responsibility for their actions and are less likely to blame failures on environmental factors" (Glicken and Glicken, p.177). When the participants were asked whether or not they felt they were discriminated against because of their ethnicity, an overwhelming majority of respondents (12) stated that they did not feel that race or ethnicity was a factor--they each were able to take responsibility for their behavior.

Questions can be raised indicating why one who has an internal locus of control becomes involved with criminal and self destructive activities. It is equally important to note that people coming from similar social and economically deprived backgrounds living in the same community do not all get involved with destructive activities.
From a social-ecological perspective, inferences can be made to explain this phenomenon. Respondents were asked to describe both good and bad experiences in school. Half of the respondents (7) said that their good experience with school was when they attended a private, Catholic or military academy at the elementary school age level. The remaining respondents (8) attributed their good experiences to graduating from Jr. high or high school. Those respondents who attended private schools saw their teachers as willing to help them learn and were concerned about their well being. Respondents stressed the importance of having a good educational curriculum and the enforcement of strict discipline as key components in their success during their elementary school age years.

The respondents' bad experiences in school began in middle, Jr. high or high school. Here, they saw their teachers as not helping—especially if one did not understand the work. Respondents engaged in disputes with teachers and (7) of the respondents reported that gang violence was prevalent. Many of respondents dropped out of school for a more safer and attractive life on the streets. Regarding their educational experiences, half of the respondents said that they felt they were socially promoted and that the teachers really did not teach.
In the Oake's (1986) study of tracking, which "Involved more than 300 secondary school English and mathematics classes, [Oake] found 200 classes that were segregated by students' ability or achievement level... Students in lower-track classes viewed their teacher as punitive and were exposed to a lower quality of instruction (for example, worked in workbooks and practiced language mechanics and computation). There classrooms were more often characterized by alienation, distance, and hostility. Students in the higher-track classes were exposed to high-status content - literature, expository and thematic writing, library research, and mathematical ideas. Students in this track perceived their teachers as concerned and supportive, peers often were seen as non threatening allies" (Allen-Meares; 1990 p. 285).

The literature supports the notion that a child's perception and attitude can change under certain environmental stressors. The environmental conditions under which the participants in this study functioned, half were subjected to substandard education environments similar to those in the Oakes study.
CONCLUSION

Although the 1992 Los Angeles riots have grave consequences for the community at large, they do not seem to have had a negative impact on the perception of the future for young African American male inmates. The enormous social problems facing our society, i.e., homelessness, joblessness and limited resources for educational advancement, do not seem to have altered the optimism of the majority of respondents.

From the results, this author concludes that the perception of the future for African American males, when released from incarceration, is bright. This indicates that they have a strong internal locus of control, suggesting that they feel that they can achieve on the job and educationally. The majority of respondents have a positive outlook for employment opportunities when released. Although respondents feel that the skills they have received while incarcerated have adequately prepared them for the job market, greater emphasis is placed on the fact that self-direction and motivation can lead to positive behaviors, after parole, for this population.

Contrary to the results from this study, other studies (i.e. Zytkoskee, Strickland, and Watson (1971), indicates
that Blacks tend to have external locus of control relative to whites. This means that Blacks view life events (i.e. incarceration, unemployment, high school drop-out, etc.) as occurrences that are independent of their own actions. The studies also seem to suggest that Blacks are in a web of dependency, whereas they see powerful others being in control of their life circumstances. The respondents in this study, however, do not look at the environmental conditions or "the white man" as causing their present state of being. They see themselves as being in control of their past and present actions. This is not to say that respondents are unaware of their social environment which has a significant impact on the current conditions in their communities. It is to say that they believe they can achieve on the job and educationally despite external forces. This says a lot about the mental health of the respondents.

Throughout this study, respondents did not attribute their circumstances to family or social antecedents. Current statistics indicate that little over half of Black families are headed by females. It has been theorized that the "pathology" in the African American community is due to the absentee father who is supposed to serve as a role model for the young male. Almost half (see table 1) of
respondents were raised by their mothers while the remaining respondents were raised by both parents or a close relative. Although a two parent family is essential for the normal growth and development of children, family composition does not appear to be a factor in the perception of the future for respondents in this study.

Social or familial antecedents do not seem to be factors in respondents’ past behaviors, nor do they seem to influence the perceptions of their future. The question, however, still remains: why are so many young African American males filling the prisons and jails and are dropping out of school in record numbers?

Statistics regarding the plight of young Black males all seem to indicate an uncertain future for this valuable group. Wright notes that Black males, "represent 6 percent of the country’s population but more than 40 percent of the prison population; is more then twice as likely to be unemployed as an Anglo man; the leading cause of death among Black males between the ages of 15 and 24 is homicide; an 18 percent of Black males drop out of high school" (Wright, 1992). In a country which has as its creed, "Life", "Liberty", and the "Pursuit of Happiness", one could ask if these philosophical ideas apply to the young African American male.
American history is replete with examples of injustices against African Americans. Various schools of thought in the religious, academic, and philosophical arenas have indicated reasons for the substandard economical, political, and social conditions of African Americans. Many African Americans were told by Whites that sections of the Old Testament (Genesis) indicated that their plight in life was due to an ancient "curse" that Almighty God placed on them which forever doomed them to servitude. Remnants of this belief continues to exist today. As time progressed and people became more "sophisticated", a more "scientific" method emerged to rationalize the substandard conditions of African Americans. The notion that Blacks had limited mental capacities than Whites, and that Blacks were more prone to crime and other anti-social behaviors became popular. These notions were developed and perpetuated by the social and behavioral sciences which ultimately influenced the educational and other social arenas in this society. The educational institution is where these ideas had and is having a devastating impact on the psychology of African Americans. "...To handicap a student by teaching him that his black face is a curse and that his struggle to change his condition is hopeless is the worst sort of
lynching. It kills one's aspirations and dooms him to vagabondage and crime" (Woodson, 1933).

Today, society's perceptions of young black males, particularly in the inner cities, are that they all belong to gangs, they all sell or use drugs, they are all criminals, and that they have no focus or directions in life. It is easy for one to look at the conditions of our inner cities and at the behaviors of those who live there, and conclude that society is justified in building more penal institutions to house those involved in anti-social behaviors. But what is difficult, is for one to stop and make an analysis of the causes for the conditions in the inner cities. Society at large is more comfortable thinking that the individual is responsible for his or her plight in life without considering social ecological factors.

The capitalist system, under which we function, is a major factor which contributes to the conditions of the inner cities. The removal of factories and other major industry from the inner cities has created massive unemployment which seem to have had a "domino" effect in the African American community. Crime, high school drop out, teenage pregnancy, homicide and suicide, are by-products
of a declining society. Despite these social and economic conditions, blame, to a large extent, is left with the individual and his or her family.

The results from this study indicate that the respondents are willing and able to accept responsibility for their actions and can deal with the consequences. But they alone cannot solve this problem. As long as this society continues to deny its involvement and allow the destruction of young African American males to continue, the consequences of this neglect will be such that all Americans will be gravely affected. It is time for this society to take a new look at itself and to address the social issues that not only affect African Americans, but will eventually affect all Americans.
APPENDIX A
PERMISSION LETTER FROM AGENCY

State of California

Memorandum

To: Dr. Morris
Calif. State University, San Bernardino
Research Director
School of Social Work

From: Heman G. Stark Youth Training School
P.O. Box 800
Ontario, CA 91761

Date: December 1, 1992

Subject: David Petway

This letter is in reference to David Petway, a student assigned to your Department. Please be advised that David has been granted permission to conduct his research project at the Heman G. Stark Youth Training School.

Dr. Valerie Samuel, Psychologist, will act as his liaison with the Department. Should you need confirmation or any assistance, you may feel free to contact her at (714) 597-1861 x477. If I may be of further assistance, do not hesitate to contact me.

cc: Dr. Valerie Samuel
Frank Ornelas, Deputy Superintendent
APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

PARTICIPANT’S NAME ________________________________

TREATMENT TEAM ________________________________

This research project is a study of incarcerated African American males perception of the future. The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of the Los Angeles riots on inmates who maintains family connections and residential status in South Central Los Angeles. Data will be collected using face-to-face interviews. Participants are chosen by random sampling.

I, ____________________________, am aware and have given consent to participate in the research project entitled "What affect did the Los Angeles riots have on African American males perception of the future while confined to a penal institution?"

The purpose of this study has been explained to me by David Petway, the researcher from California State University, San Bernardino Department of Social Work. I understand that the purpose of this research is related to completion of a research requirement in the Graduate Department of Social Work.

The research procedure involves a one hour interview with the use of a tape recorder and note taking. I give the researcher my consent to record our interview session with the understanding that the tape(s) will be erased following its intended use.

I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that all information is confidential and that my identity will not be revealed. I am free to withdraw consent and to discontinue participation in the project at any time.

_________________________________________  __________________________
(Participant’s Signature)                     (Date)

_________________________________________
(Witness’ Signature)
APPENDIX C

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

Should there be any question regarding the research project, please address them to: The Department of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB), 5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino, California, (714) 880-5501, or Dr. Valerie Samuel, Psychologist I & J Treatment Team at (714) 587-1861 ext 477.

California State University, San Bernardino, and researcher named below have the responsibility for insuring that participants in research projects conducted under university auspices are guaranteed confidentiality for such participation. The persons named above may be contacted for questions resulting from such activities.

The undersigned agrees to participate in the project based on conditions stated above and those mentioned in the consent form.

______________________________  _________________________________
(Participant’s Signature)         (Researcher)

______________________________
(Date)
APPENDIX D

INSTRUMENT

AGE:  18  19  20  21  22  23  24  25
MARITAL STATUS: SINGLE MARRIED DIVORCED SEPARATED
NUMBER OF CHILDREN: NONE ONE TWO THREE FOUR OR MORE
FAMILY OF ORIGIN: Who were you raised by?
   A. Mother
   B. Father
   C. Both Parents
   D. Relatives
   E. Non-Relatives

NUMBER OF SIBLINGS: ___________
YEARS LIVED IN LOS ANGELES AREA: ___________
EDUCATIONAL LEVEL:  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  11  12  13  14  15  16
EMPLOYMENT: NUMBER OF PAST JOBS: ___________
AGE WHEN FIRST INCARCERATED: ___________
NUMBER OF TIMES INCARCERATED: ___________
DATE WHEN CONFINEMENT TIME ENDS: ___________

COMMITMENT OFFENSE: ____________________________

__________________________
APPENDIX E
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. During the Los Angeles riots, were you incarcerated?
   YES  NO
   a. If not, did you participate in the riots?
   b. If so, why? ____________________________

2. When you were watching the L.A. riots on T.V., what impact did you think it would have on your future?
   a. Why did you feel that way?

3. As you think about the L.A. riots now, how do you think they will impact your future?

4. Regarding your educational experience, think of a time when you had a good experience in school.
   a. When was it?
   b. Describe it.

5. Also, think of a time when you had a bad experience in school.
   a. When was it?
   b. Describe it.

6. As you think of the education system in your community, do you feel that it had a positive or negative impact on your life?
   a. Why do you feel this way?

7. Describe the feelings you now have about education. Do you feel that it will affect your future?
   a. Why do you feel that way?

8. What do you think of the criminal justice system.

9. Regarding the Criminal Justice System; do you feel that you were discriminated against because of your ethnicity?
   a. Why do you feel that way?

10. Describe how you see the presence of the police in your community.
11. Do you feel that the treatment of black males by the police is different than with other ethnic groups? 
a. Why do you feel this way?

12. Do you feel that the Criminal Justice will be more positive towards African Americans in the future, will remain the same, or get worse? 
a. Why do you feel this way?

13. Describe how you feel about your chances of getting a job when you are released. 
a. Why do you feel that way?

14. Do you feel that the skills you have received while incarcerated has adequately prepared you for employment when you are released? 
a. Why? Or Why not?

15. Do you think that the riots will have an affect on your employment opportunities when you are released? 
a. Why do you feel this way?

16. What do you think were the causes of the riots?
REFERENCES


