

Jason Sanford

They

(A rainstorm in February 1993. Saturday afternoon. We are in an office at the Mark Taper Forum. Lamplight. A handsome white man in his late twenties wearing blue jeans and a plaid shirt and Timberland boots. He played tennis in competition for years and looks like a tennis player.)

Who's they?

That's interesting,

'cause the they is

a combination of a lot of things.

Being brought up in Santa Barbara,

it's a little bit different saying "they" than being brought up in,

um,

LA,

I think,

'cause

being brought up in Santa Barbara

you don't see a lot of blacks.

You see Mexicans,

you see some Chinese,

but you don't see blacks.

There was maybe two black people in my school.

I don't know, you don't say

black

or you don't say

Negro

or,

no,

yeah,

you really don't.

I work with one.

Um,

because

of what I look like

I don't know if I'd been beaten.

I sure the hell would have been arrested
and pushed down on the ground."

"I don't think it would have gone as far.

It wouldn't have.

Even the times that I have been arrested
they always make comments

about God, you look like Mr.,

uh,

all-American white boy.

That has actually been said to me

by a ... by a

cop.

Ya know,

“Why do you have so many warrants?”

Ya know ...

“Shouldn’t you be takin’ care of this?”

Ya know ...

“You look like an all-American white boy.

You look responsible.”

And

I remember being arrested in Santa Barbara one time

and

driving back

in the cop car

and having a conversation about tennis

with the cops.

So,

ah,

I’m sure I’m seen by the police totally different
than a black man.”

Theresa Allison

Lightning But No Rain

Founder of Mothers Reclaiming Our Children (Mothers ROC) Mother of gang truce architect Dewayne Holmes (Amazing black hat and bracelets on both arms. Beautiful rings.)

Mothers ROC came about right after my nephew was killed,
 November the 29th of '91.
 After the death of my nephew, my son
 Dewayne
 thought about a peace among,
 you know, the, the guys in the project—
 I don't want to say gangs—
 the young men.
 The truce, they started meeting every Sunday,
 so I thought about
 a group of mothers gettin' together,
 so I thought about
 the words
 Reclaiming Our Children.
 I knew that there was
 a lot of kids going to prison,
 a lot of kids going to the cemetery
 by the hands of our enemy,
 the unjust system.
 Then my son Dewayne was sentenced for a crime he did not do.
 When they killed Tiny—
 when I say "they," I mean the police.
 They shot forty-three times.
 Five bullets went into Tiny.
 No bullets went in nobody else's body.
 I think what they do, they want to make it look like a drive-by
 shooting.
 See, when the gangs
 shoot at each other
 it's a lot of 'em
 fire
 (She shows the shooting with her hand)
 bullets.
 When they killed Tiny, they were in unmarked cars.
 When they shot my nephew, they were dressed like gang members,
 duck-walkin',
 with hard beanies, jackets, no badges or anything,
 all over the project,
 like
 birds!

Carmen

Angela King, Aunt of Rodney King

A shop in Pasadena. A very, very rainy day. We are sitting in the back of the shop. She insists that my assistant, Kishisha Jefferson, join us, because she thought it was not good to make Kishisha sit in the car in the rain. We are in the back of her shop. There are work tables with paints, etc. She makes T-shirts. The shop itself is a boutique with clothing for men, women, and children. Some of the clothing is Afrocentric in design, other items are more mainstream. She is a powerful looking woman with a direct gaze and wavy hair, and a warmth that is natural, even when it is not intended. She looks as though she has Native American ancestry. She is wearing a white sweater, a long skirt, and boots. She smokes a cigarette. There is an iron gate at the main door that is painted white. There is a small television in the back where we are. She lives in an area behind where we are sitting. The interview was actually scheduled for the day before, but she was reluctant to speak with me, because when I arrived Kishisha was in the car. (Kishisha normally drove me to, but did not attend, each interview.) It is ironic that now at the rescheduled time, she insists that Kishisha join us.

Our life is something like,
uh,
what's the name of that picture
with Dorothy Dandridge
when she was like
a prostitute and the guy she met was in the Air Force—
“the service?
Carmen.
Dorothy Dandridge
and Harry Belafonte—
that was us.
How they partied a lot,
and the guy in in the Air Force,
the way he was conservative,
was my father.
We were brought up
for about five or six years like that.
The part where she was ...
she got in some trouble,
the way my mom,
she cut my father:
They were at the NCO club,
they got to drinkin',
and they went to jail out on the base.
She stabbed him—
oh yeah, honey—
he had a scar on his neck.
She went to jail behind that.
We were twelve or thirteen years old.
It seems like it should have been in a movie:
separated and
livin' in different homes

and then joinin' back together in different homes
and reuniting.

My brother and I were only two that stayed together,
and that brother was the father of Rodney.

Things that we did
like goin fishin',
and then on Franklin,
the Sacramento River,
and then ...

I ain't never seen nothing like it in my life.

It was me, Rodney, Paul, and Sam,

Rodney's friend,

and I looked up and Rodney was down in the water—

had his pants rolled,

feet and all,

like these Africans—

done caught him a big old trout

by his—

with his hands.

That was the worst mess I seen.

Got him like this here:

"I got him, I got him!

I got a big ...

'bout that big ..."

I said, "Boy, you sure you ain't got some African in you?"

Allen Cooper, a.k.a. Big Al Bubble Gum Machine Man

Ex-gang member, ex-convict, activist in national truce movement

(He is wearing an odd cap with a button, and buttons on his shirt. In a gym in Nickerson Gardens, 5:30 P.M.)

The L.A. Four they committed a crime of what?
 Assault
 and battery?
 And what did the government dig for?
 What did they dig for?
 Stoppin' traffic of a truck?
 Are they sure that truck belonged in that area?"
 "Did they check to see if that truck qualified to fit on that city street?
 No, they didn't check that.
 That wasn't a highway or nothin';
 that was a boulevard.
 He was turnin' off a residential street!
 You gotta understand, it may have been a
 intimidation move,
 OK,
 drivin' into a location that is at a uprising.
 And I guess he's at a point tryin' to prove he can get
 past.
 Any other commonsense person
 woulda went around.
 But we're not basin' our life on Reginald Denny;
 neither are we basin' our lives on Rodney King.
 Only thing we're expressing through the Rodney King—
 through Reginald Denny beating—
 it shows how
 a black person gets treated in his community.
 And it was once brought to the light
 and shown
 and then we still ... we see no belief,
 because they never handled, from the top of the level, the way it
 should have been handled,
 because they handled like a soap opera.
 That's all that
 really was.
 If you put twenty hidden cameras
 in the country jail system,
 you got people beat worse than that
 point blank.

Peter Sellers

Long Day's Journey into Night

Director, Los Angeles Festival

(Sunday morning, February 1993. We are at the Pacific Dining Car restaurant. Peter tells me it's a place where power breakfasts happen. There are very few people there. It's an old-fashioned kind of restaurant. Peter gets very emotional while he speaks, almost in tears.)

Dad ... he won't replace the burnt-out light bulbs.
 You know, he yells at the family for complaining and condemns everyone
 to live in darkness.
 'Cause he's too cheap
 to put in some light bulbs.
 That's what America feels like right now.
 Just asked him for some light bulbs.
 Burned out here and here and here.
 Couldn't we replace them?
 With brighter ones?
 And ... James Tyrone ...
 he's too cheap.
 He rants on and on about everything he's always done for you.
 How he's lived his whole life just to support his family.
 But he won't replace the light bulbs.
 And he's grew up on a culture of success.
 So the only thing that was of any interest to this man has to be
 success,
 you know,
 which is America.
 Here's a man who has been a success
 and of course he's at home with that.
 Right now in America, there isn't a family ...
 We may have a good GNP
 but not a family to come home to.
 Can't live in our own house.
 That's what the LA riots is about.
 We can't live,
 our own house burning.
 This isn't somebody else's house,
 it's our own house.
 This is the city we are living in.
 It's our house.
 We all live in the same house ...
 Right, start a fire in the basement
 and, you know,
 nobody's gonna be left on the top floor.
 It's one house.
 And shutting the door in your room,

it doesn't matter.

Fact is, you have a stronger sense of getting incinerated,
you know, and the task is,
you know.

I mean, Eugene O'Neill
wrote the classic play about
the American dream.

Twilight Bey Limbo/Twilight #2

Organizer of gang truce

(In a Denny's restaurant in a shopping center. Saturday morning, February 1993. He is a gang member. He is short, graceful, very dark skinned. He is soft-spoken and even in his delivery. He is very confident.)

Twilight Bey,
that's my name.
When I was
twelve and thirteen,
I stayed out until, they say,
until the sun come up.
Every night, you know,
and that was my thing.
I was a
watchdog.
You know, I stayed up in the neighborhood,
make sure we wasn't being rolled on and everything,
and when people
came into light
a what I knew,
a lot a people said,
"Well, Twilight, you know,
you a lot smarter and you have a lot more wisdom than those
twice your age."
And what I did, you know,
I was
at home writing one night
and I was writing my name
and I just looked at it and it came ta me:
"twi,"
abbreviation
of the word "twice."
You take a way the "ce."
You have the last word,
"light."
"Light" is a word that symbolizes knowledge, knowing,
wisdom,
within the Koran and the Holy Bible.
Twilight.
I have twice the knowledge of those my age,
twice the understanding of those my age.
So twilight
is
that time
between day and night.

Limbo,
I call it limbo.
So a lot of times when I've brought up ideas to my homeboys,
they say,
"Twilight,
that's before your time,
that's something you can't do now."
When I talked about the truce back in 1988,
that was something they considered before its time,
yet
in 1992
we made it
realistic.
So to me it's like I'm stuck in limbo,
like the sun is stuck between night and day
in the twilight hours.
You know,
I'm in an area not many people exist.
Nighttime to me
is like a lack of sun,
and I don't affiliate
darkness with anything negative.
I affiliate
darkness with what was first,
because it was first,
and then relative to my complexion.
I am a dark individual,
and with me stuck in limbo,
I see darkness as myself.