

SHOULD YOU PUBLISH?

You are the editor-in-chief of a major daily newspaper in Los Angeles. It is 1993, and the events surrounding the Rodney King trial (and the resulting riots/uprising) are still fresh in everyone's minds. Many people still want to read about the events, and everyone is considering the impact of the riots on their own lives. Even people who have never before thought about race relations or raised questions about institutional racism are doing these things now. The newspaper you edit is owned by a wealthy White publisher, and the target audience for the paper is an upscale group – mostly upper middle-class readers, many of whom are White or Asian-American businesspeople, although there are certainly some upper middle-class African-American readers. The bias of the paper is usually towards moderate to conservative viewpoints, though not extremely conservative. Your advertisers are selling products to this upscale group – many of them sell services for businesspeople. The following piece of writing is sent to you as a letter to the editor. Will you publish it? Give your answer, and three reasons to support it on a separate sheet of paper.

Mob Mentalities

By [Richard von Busack](#)

<http://www.metroactive.com>

AFTER LOS ANGELES blew up in 1965, an analyst of the Watts riots named Robert Conot, listed suggestions to keep the next riot from happening. In Conot's 1967 book *Rivers of Blood, Years of Darkness* he proposed, among other things, a massive literacy campaign, raising the amount of welfare to sustenance level and job training programs. The government and the people of L.A., who remained blind to what was going on south of the Santa Monica Freeway, ignored these ideas. Conot concluded by saying the 1965 riots occurred because "Negroes were fed up and whites were fed pap." So it continued for the next 25 years...Officer Mark Fuhrman, the racist cop deposed in the O. J. Simpson case, shocked a lot of outsiders. But his opinions were no surprise to people who'd read the novels of ex-Los Angeles Police Department cop Joseph Wambaugh. Nor were they news to victims of other LAPD muscle-flexing...The LAPD's K-9 unit "find and bite" policy of the late 1980s and early 1990s resulted--according to the ACLU--in 900 people chomped by LAPD Rottweilers and German Shepherds.

I was never bitten myself, but as a card-carrying member of the Los Angeles underclass during the 1970s, I spent a lot of time assuming the position for LAPD officers. And my skin's white. A friend of mine, an L.A. Sephardic Jew, is darker. The cops pull him over frequently, once saying "What's the hurry, amigo?" No place I've lived since--Santa Cruz, San Jose, San Francisco, the East Bay--have I been so frequently followed, interrogated and harassed as in L.A. So when the Rodney King footage was released, and the...riots broke out, the only surprise was that it had taken so long for the explosion.