

On Jan. 26, I marched through downtown Los Angeles to City Hall with more than 20,000 protesters demanding an end to Bush's Mideast war. The marchers were overwhelmingly white. The demonstration was the largest in the city in more than 20 years.

On April 6, I again marched through downtown Los Angeles. The target was Parker Center, headquarters of the Los Angeles Police Department. The protest target was not U.S. government-sanctioned violence against people of color in the Middle East, but local government-sanctioned

violence against people of color in Los Angeles. The marchers numbered 6,000 to 7,000. They were overwhelmingly Black.

My question: In less than three months, where did the white progressives disappear to? At two previous Saturday demonstrations at Parker Center, maybe three hundred people showed up, and they were nearly all

Daryl Gates and police violence sharply symbolizes the racism, poverty, exploitation and abuse of power that people of color suffer nationally. Whites fall into a dangerous trap if they view the fight to remove Gates and end police violence as a racial or merely a local issue.

To understand what's at stake let's look closely at the Los Angeles Police Department. During its brutal history, environmentalists, labor organizers, peace demonstrators and students have felt the sting of police batons. The Los Angeles and New York City police departments were the first big city departments to form "Red Squads" to monitor and harass leftists. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the Los Angeles police conducted notorious witchhunts against Communists and liberals in the city. The House Un-American Activities Committee made frequent use of Los Angeles Police Department surveillance files to persecute unionists, entertainers, educators and liberal political leaders during the 1950s.

The clubbing of hundreds of white anti-war demonstrators in Los Angeles in 1967 was further proof that the police were willing to crack white skulls, too. Police officers openly boasted following the march that "we beat the hell out of them," and "we taught them what this city thinks of their kind."

The Los Angeles Police Department's policies, tactics and training methods are widely emulated by police departments nationally and internationally. Its procedures for crowd control and political surveillance have been copied by army and police forces in repressive regimes throughout Latin America. Gates has never regarded the LAPD as just another local police department. In the past, he has offered to send SWAT units to quash rebels in Iran, Nicaragua and El Salvador.

Gates likens himself to a general who sets policy and runs the show. The department's chain of command structure is a model of military authoritarianism. The cops on the beat are the foot soldiers, taught to follow orders without question. There is no room for dissent. The "kick butt" syndrome is

instilled in police recruits at every step from the academy to the street. Bush's singling out of Gates as the country's "model" police chief when presenting him with an award last summer was fitting reward for the nation's leading domestic proponent of "new world order" domination.

Given the history of police repression, why aren't the streets of downtown Los Angeles and the blocks around Parker Center filled with white activists demanding the removal of Gates and the end to the police war against African-Americans? Where are the angry statements, editorials, position papers and petitions from white progressives on police violence?

Why did Pacifica Radio, the progressive voice of the national airwaves, for nearly two weeks relegate the Rodney King beating and the reaction of the African-American leaders to the end of its news programming? Why hasn't the Guardian provided extensive coverage and analysis, and made appeals to organize around the issue of

community to combat police abuse?

How is it that thousands of white activists can wage passionate campaigns against oppression and human rights abuses in Chile, El Salvador, South Africa, China, the Occupied Territories and the Philippines but not in the ghettos and barrios of their own cities? Why is it that white progressives are continually struck by political paralysis and unable to unite with African-Americans in anti-racist struggles on U.S. streets?

RACIAL AMBIVALENCE?

The list of sponsors for the January peace march in Los Angeles and other cities filled several pages and read like a who's who of the progressive movement. Yet scanning the list of sponsors of the anti-Gates marches few of the same names appeared. Why?

I have marched, picketed and sat-in for a variety of progressive causes during the past 25 years. Still, I am amazed at the political myopia that affects white progressives when it comes to bread-and-butter issues that concern African-Americans. But then maybe it isn't political myopia. Maybe their hesitance to attack the problems of racism, violence and economic oppression in their own backyard merely reflects the deep feelings of racial (or racist?) ambivalence many feel toward African-Americans.

Could it be that many white progressives have swallowed the media-inculcated stereotypes of African-Americans as criminals, dope dealers, welfare queens and social derelicts? These distortions have become fixed features in press accounts, news articles and profiles on the African-American community. Could it also be that a decade of Reagan-Bush assaults on welfare, education, job and social programs have conditioned many white progressives to believe that these programs are government handouts to undeserving, crime-prone Blacks?

Police brutality: Where are the white leftists?

By EARL OFARI HUTCHINSON

Earl Ofari Hutchinson, "Police Brutality: Where are the white leftists?" *Guardian*, New York: May, 1, 1991. (This alternative newspaper no longer exists.)

If so, the time is now for white progressives to shed their color blinders and see that the fight against Bush's "new world order" begins at home. The Reagan-Bush slash-and-burn social policies and media

slander of African-Americans have resulted in the devaluation of Black lives. It became easy for many in the United States to ignore Iraqi civilian deaths when smart bombs and cruise missiles rained destruction on their cities.

For many in the United States it matters little if the victims of official violence are African-Americans, Iraqis, Cubans, Panamanians, Grenadians or Lebanese. To them they're all the same: non-white, poor and therefore a threat. The U.S. pilots called fleeing Iraqi troops "roaches" and gleefully described strafing them as a "turkey shoot." The Los Angeles Police officers who assaulted Rodney King called Blacks "gorillas" and "lizards" and gleefully compared his beating to "hitting home runs." Whether the patrol beat is the skies over Iraq or the streets of Los Angeles, it's still "Us" against "Them."

The campaign against Gates and against police violence nationally presents a golden opportunity to re-energize the peace and justice movement and build coalitions with African-American and Latino organizations. So, I say to white progressives:

- Send letters and telegrams and make phone calls to local officials to demand effective civilian control commissions to review police policies, procedures and practices.

- Join in demonstrations and rallies against police brutality with local NAACP chapters and other Black organizations.

- Organize forums, teach-ins and demonstrations in your communities in support of institutional police reform.

Remember the words of James Baldwin: "For if they take you in the morning they will be coming for us that night."

For information on Los Angeles organizing against police brutality: **Brotherhood Crusade, 200 E. Slauson Ave., Los Angeles, Calif. 90011.**

To contact local NAACP chapters: **NAACP national office, (301) 358-8900.**

Other groups working on police brutality include the **Southern Christian Leadership Conference, (404) 681-2437;**

the **American Civil Liberties Union, (212) 944-9800;** and the **National Lawyers Guild, (212) 966-5000.** ■

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Why hasn't the Guardian provided extensive coverage and analysis and made appeals to organize around the issue of institutional police violence?