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OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL ADVISOR
TO THE BOARD OF POLICE COMMISSIONERS
CITY OF LOS ANGELES

MEMORANDUM

ABSTRACT

Interviewee: Reverend Cecil Murray

Interviewers: John H. Brinsley, Cornell J. Price,
Donald Walton and Lynne Hobbs

Reverend Cecil "Chip" Murray heads one of the largest black congregations in Los Angeles. His church has approximately 8,500 members. He is a very prominent community leader. The interview with Reverend Murray was particularly helpful in illustrating the extent of planning in which some community leaders participated in anticipation of the verdicts. Reverend Murray was instrumental in organizing 150 men to patrol South Central neighborhoods to avert violence.

Reverend Murray has a strong commitment to rebuilding Los Angeles and has various recommendations, such as converting a military camp into a training and shelter center for the needy and homeless. Reverend Murray is inspiring and hopeful; he would make an excellent speaker at the public hearings.

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MEMORANDUM

To: Richard J. Stone,
General Counsel

Date: August 18, 1992

From: Cornell Price and John H. Brinsley,
Deputy General Counsel

Subject: Interview with Reverend Cecil Murray

We interviewed Reverend Cecil Murray, Minister of the First African Methodist Episcopal Church ("FAME"), on Friday, August 7, 1992 at 3:00 p.m. at his office at 2270 South Harvard Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90018. The interview lasted approximately two hours. The following is a summary of our recollections of this meeting, including our questions and comments, together with our mental impressions, conclusions, and opinions, based upon the meeting.

I. Background

Reverend Cecil ("Chip") Murray heads FAME, which has a congregation of 8,500 members. He is considered by

the community and public officials to be a major community leader. The church serves its congregation with many community assistance programs, such as drug abuse prevention, day care, shelter and job training.

II. Anticipation of the Verdict

Approximately two weeks before the civil unrest, Mayor Bradley convened a meeting at City Hall comprising of eight people. Among the people gathered were Danny Bakewell, John Mack and Joe Hicks. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss plans for the aftermath of the verdicts.

The group agreed that everyone should meet at FAME the night the verdict was announced. If the verdicts were positive, the group would advance Proposition F. If the verdicts were adverse, then the group would attempt to defuse the community's anger so as not to repeat the Watts Riots of 1965. Reverend Murray felt, however, that an eruption was inevitable should the verdicts be adverse.

At these pre-verdict meetings (which numbered approximately five), Reverend Murray's group, a sub-group of the one organized by Mayor Bradley, organized a consortium

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of ten black churches to serve as watchtowers. Each church provided 25 men to walk the streets in an effort to quell potential violence. The plan was that after the meeting at FAME, each group of men would gather at one of five churches. Each group of men was to be equipped with radios and then be dispatched to various flashpoints in the surrounding neighborhoods. As it happened, they never gathered at the churches because the city already was on fire.

Reverend Murray believes that every citizen with sensitivity knew that something could happen. "Leadership," in general, knew that adverse verdicts could lead to an "explosive situation."

III. Intelligence

Reverend Murray believes that the LAPD knew that adverse verdicts could lead to an explosive situation. The reason they did not respond to the civil unrest was to "let them Black people burn themselves up," since they thought that the violence would be confined to the black community.

IV. Planning

Reverend Murray said that Chief Gates would have been "poised to move" if he felt that there was a risk to the white community. Since Gates believed the destruction would be confined to the black community, he did not respond to any plan.

V. Oversight of the LAPD

Reverend Murray did not discuss oversight of the LAPD. Commenting generally on how the city oversees and directs, the Reverend stated that when a committee, as oppose to a centralized person, governs, it is almost impossible to respond reflexively to an emergency. A centralized person must be in charge.

VI. Effects of Political Atmosphere and Pre-verdict Comments

Reverend Murray believes that the Natasha Harlin incident foretold the flashpoint. He also stated that Chief Darryl Gates' reign was very unpopular. The LAPD made women, while dressed in their finery, lie prostrate on the ground after they are pulled over. The LAPD acted with

impunity. Gates brought out the worst in people and gave the crazy element of our society a reason to be crazy.

Reverend Murray stated that people were also filled with understandable impatience at community leadership. People were sick of "talk" and wanted to be told what to do about the injustice that they were experiencing. People generally -- but particularly minority people -- were traumatized by allowing themselves to hope in the justice system and then be betrayed.

VII. LAPD Management

Reverend Murray stated that Chief Gates' reign was very unpopular. He allowed the LAPD's policy of making women lie prostrate on the ground after being pulled over. He allowed racial insults to be communicated on the air waves with impunity. The atmosphere was one of corruption and absolution.

VIII. LAPD Relationship to Police Commission

Reverend Murray did not discuss this topic.

IX. Adequacy of Police Response

The LAPD has a program where eight police officers act as liaisons between the community and the LAPD. Officers Alfred Zimmerman and Reginald Page were assigned to the South West division which includes FAME. During the initial stages of the civil unrest, a policeman maintained an office at the church where he was able to call for assistance during various crises involving the church's neighborhood. The program was very helpful and effective. Reverend Murray particularly praised Officer Zimmerman's efforts. The program has since been dismantled.

X. Reasons for Inadequacies

Reverend Murray alluded to the fact that the police did not listen to the church's group of men when it came to protect firemen at a particular location. During a fire at Adams Boulevard and La Salle Street, 150 men gathered to protect the firemen. The police then arrived and the on-lookers became hostile. From 10:00 P.M. to 3:00 A.M., the police and the crowd did a dance of advance and retreat. The church members were telling the police:

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"We'll work with you. Let us handle it;" yet the police did not listen.

Reverend Murray also stated that Gates' utter contempt for the black community lead him to rejoice when the community burned. Because Gates believed the violence would be confined, he did not respond.

Reverend Murray also stated that because no centralized person is in control, the ability to respond quickly to an emergency is limited.

XI. Nature of the Violence

Any "cool" that the community could maintain was negated by the impossibility of the verdicts. The judicial system tampered with people's expectations and created an atmosphere where people did not believe in anything.

By and large, the gangs are not destructive. Only 10% of the gang population is very destructive. That 10% will incite the other 90% once given a reason to do so.

The progression of the fires indicated that the community's anger was of "racism, classism and annihilism," i.e. a state of pure cynicism.

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The Koreans were the target of much violence, because Blacks were avenging the gross mistreatment that Koreans exhibit to them. Koreans have a harsh view of Blacks. "They spit on Blacks after taking their money." Blacks resent the fact that any group "coming off of the boat can make money off of the backs of Black folk."

The FAME's group of men, consisting of 150 men, averted much bloodshed. The Reverend considered them a very effective tool. The church additionally aided the community during the riots by offering free food and supplies.

XII. Lessons Learned

The Rodney King trial became more of a political decision than a judicial one. As a result, people's expectations of what is just was tampered with. The law was manipulated.

The federal trial is another example of what will be a political, not judicial, decision. The potential for a national disturbance, therefore, exists when the public reacts to the federal decision. Reverend Murray is very concerned that acquittals in the Federal case will lead to a new wave of violence.

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In Los Angeles, the Denny decision may cause some reaction. Any extreme reaction may be averted by Willie Williams' presence and the fact that Los Angeles has already had its catharsis. Still, some anger will ignite when one standard of law is applied in one situation and another standard in the next. That is the problem when the law is not followed, but is manipulated. Los Angeles needs a therapeutic, remedial, and custodial-type mending.

Reverend Murray also noted that the way the city is structured makes it impossible for any one person to make a swift decision.

XIII. Recommendations for Improvement

Reverend Murray recommended that the police establish liaisons within the community. The liaisons would "walk" the communities and establish neighborhood watches. In that way, they would get to know the "players" in the community. Reverend Murray believes that this is very "doable." He pointed to the fact that every time a horrendous crime has been committed, someone in the community turns in the criminal. The community, therefore, is already willing to cooperate.

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Reverend Murray made specific recommendations such as legislation for gun control (12,000 guns were stolen during the riots). He also suggested a corporate sponsored program where perhaps for one month the community would dedicate itself to removing graffiti. His most comprehensive suggestion was that the city rent from the federal government a military camp in Long Beach (or the one north of Los Angeles) in order to convert it into a center to train, feed and house the poor, unskilled and under-skilled populations. He insisted that America is ready to volunteer its time and expertise. Corporations want to contribute. Government initiative is essential, however, to getting any project off the ground.

XIV. Use of the Interviewee at any Public Hearing

Reverend Murray is willing to speak at any public hearing provided that its purpose is to bring the community together.

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XV. Additional Interviewees Suggested

Reverend Murray suggested we contact the police liaisons who assisted the church during the crucial periods. They are Captain Alfred Zimmerman and Officer Reginald Page.