

When time allows, '92 riots taught in LA schools

By Teresa Watanabe, Los Angeles Times

They were not even born at the time their city erupted in flames, violence and rage against a system that would not convict Los Angeles police officers of brutally beating a black man.

But high school students Jiaya Ingram, Ashley Torres and Jessica Maldonado have been gripped by accounts of the 1992 Los Angeles riots as they learn about them through poetry and plays, readings and recollections of their parents and others.

They say they felt shock over police actions, horror over the mob violence and an uneasy feeling that it could happen again, particularly as unarmed African Americans are killed, most recently in Florida, Oklahoma and Pasadena. Yet these teenagers also express hope that they can make a difference through personal action – education about stereotypes, for instance, or peaceful protests.

“I’ve learned that you have to be the change you want to see in the world,” said Jessica, a junior at the Social Justice Leadership Academy, a small school at the Torres High School campus in East Los Angeles. “History is not wars and dates; it’s about the choices you make.”

But two decades after the riots sparked massive violence that would leave dozens dead and thousands injured, lessons about them appear to be limited in Southern California classrooms. For many teachers, the pressure to teach content that will be tested in state standardized tests and Advanced Placement exams next month has crowded out time for the riots, however crucial they are to city history and the nation’s larger civil rights struggle.

The Los Angeles Unified School District has not formally included the riots in its history curriculum because it is not part of the California social studies standards. The district plans to post material on its website for optional teacher use, however.

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