

# Where's the Outrage?

## [Racial Crimes] Where's the Outrage?

The turnout on the steps of City Hall last Friday, October 19, seemed to illustrate a point that press conference organizer Najee Ali was trying to make to a lone Fox 11 camera crew and a Los Angeles CityBeat reporter – not enough people are talking about Los Angeles' racially motivated, gang-related violence.

Ali – along with another activist, the Rev. K.W. Tulloss, and two mothers of murdered children, Anna Del Rio and Luisa Prudhomme – reserved his harshest criticism for Latino leaders. He called on them to issue strong condemnations of Latino-on-black killings. The issue garnered national media attention earlier this year with the murder of 14-year-old Cheryl Green by Latino gang members in the Harbor Gateway community, but it's been on the radar of those in the know in Los Angeles longer than that.

The L.A. County Commission on Human Relations' 1999 report on hate crimes raised an early red flag, observing that of the most violent hate crimes, the majority were racially motivated and the result of race-based gang activity. Since then, although the overall number of hate crimes has declined, the Commission's annual reports have documented a steady increase in the proportion of both race-based crimes and anti-African-American crimes.

In response to escalating gang violence, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa revealed a comprehensive gang reduction strategy earlier this year, proposing a multi-tiered approach to dismantling existing gangs and keeping new members from joining. The plan, however, did not mention the bluntly racial implications of recent gang violence in several L.A. communities.

To Ali, the omission is a critical flaw. In the wake of Cheryl Green's murder, Ali says retaliatory violence by black gangs from areas outside of Harbor Gateway was narrowly averted by a peace treaty he helped negotiate with the 204th Street gang – those believed to be responsible for Green's murder. Ali suggests the prospect of an all-out race riot is a real possibility. "If a black person witnesses a black person kill another black person, it may not elicit a response, but if a Latino kills a black person, then some people will be ready to go to war," he says.

The U.S. Attorney's Office seems to be paying attention. Under the tenure of former U.S. Attorney Debra Wong Yang, four members of the Avenues gang were convicted on federal hate crimes charges in connection with two Highland Park murders of African Americans and what the indictment called "a six-year conspiracy to assault and murder African Americans" that extended far beyond gang turf wars. An indictment issued this month by U.S. Attorney Thomas P. O'Brien against 61 members of Florencia 13 (F13) and the Mexican Mafia on racketeering and drug trafficking charges makes mention of Florencia's campaign of racial violence, and attributes the deaths of African Americans with no gang affiliations to overzealous attempts by F13 to clear out rival black gangs.

While acknowledging that black community leaders have also been less than stellar in bringing attention to the violence, Ali says he wants more from L.A.'s most visible Latino leader. "There's a myth that Mayor Villaraigosa has spoken up forcefully about this issue," says Ali. "It took him nearly a month to come down to Harbor Gateway. There are a lot of people that are upset because they feel he undermined the peace efforts we were successful in negotiating, and he hasn't been back there since." A call seeking comment from the mayor's office went unreturned.

