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THE SOURCE

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SCARFACE

DEAD MAN WALKING?
OR THE RESURRECTION
OF A HIP-HOP ICON?

NELLY

TAKES YOU DOWN,
DOWN, BABY
HIS STREET CREDITS
RANGE OVER

MYSTIKAL

NO LIMIT SOLDIER
GOES AWOL.
FIND OUT WHY

CNN

SAME OL'
THUGS
BRAND-NEW
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EXCLUSIVE:
THE TRIUMPHS
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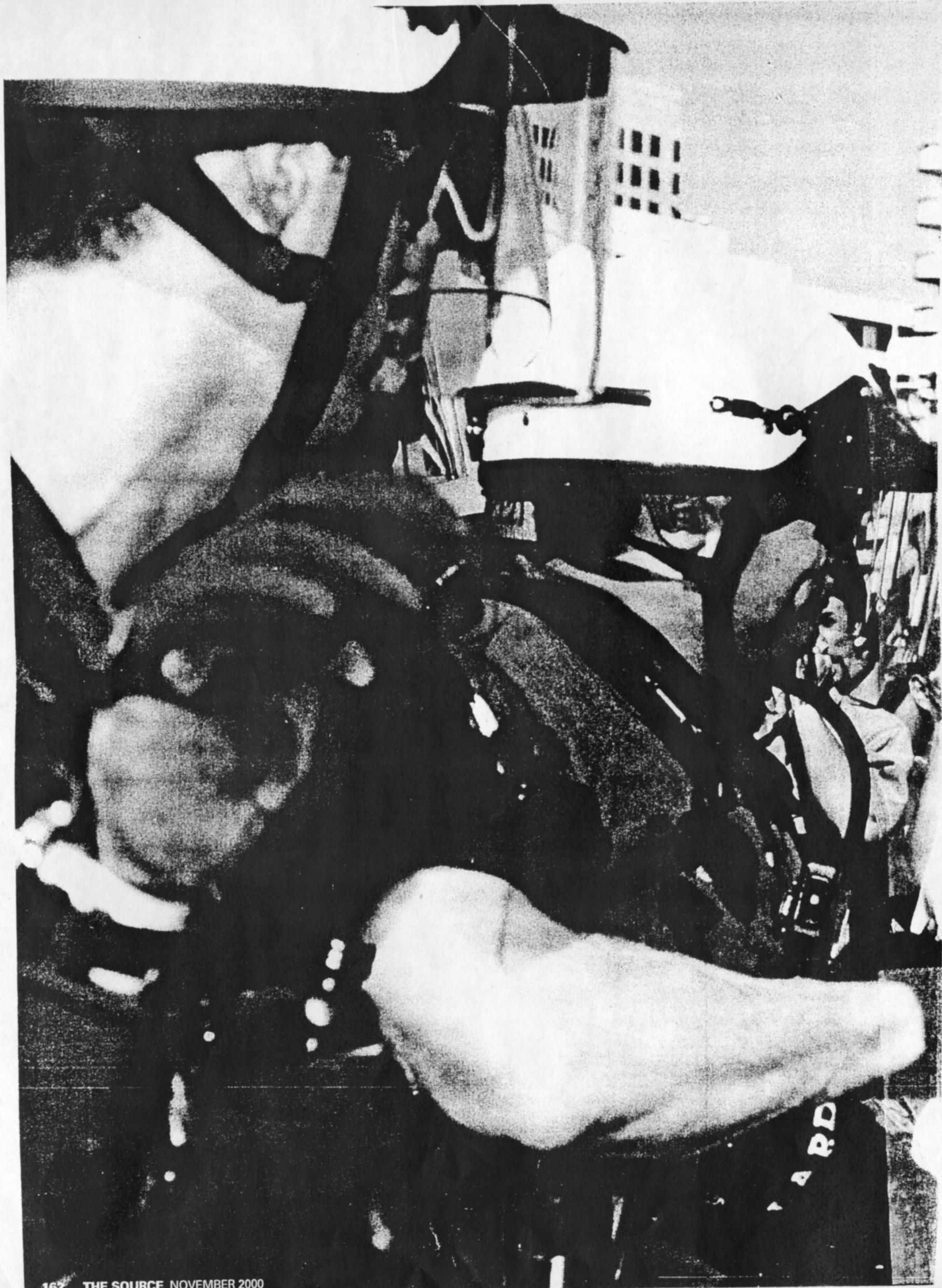
THE PEOPLE VS.
BUSH & GORE

DJ MUGGS

THE END OF
THE *REAL REAL*
WORLD

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MOVE THE CROWD



Hip-hop demanded a place at the table during the Republican and Democratic National Conventions. But nobody said it was gonna be easy. Inside the massive effort behind the mass protests.

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAWRENCE DORTCH**

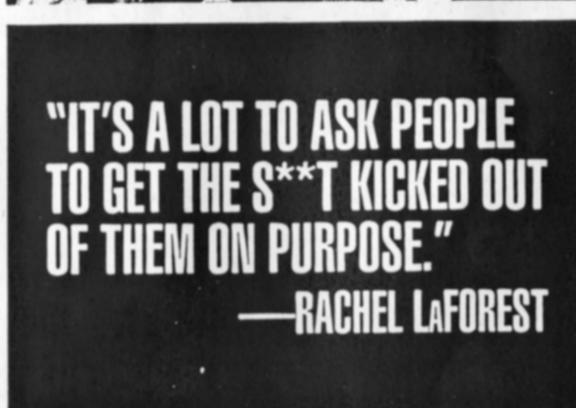
Hip-hop has always been about revolution. From the ever-changing political rhetoric of KRS-One to the Black Panther-inspired poetics of dead prez, rap music has been our way of telling the powers that be how we feel about shit. Even Jigga's flossin' and Dre's gangsta bragadocio can be seen as small acts of resistance—ways of showing America that cats from the 'hood can achieve success on their own terms.

Hence it came as a surprise that hip-hop was ghost when 45,000 activists, anarchists and random heads tore up Seattle last winter. The protestors, mostly college-age white kids, were outraged over the World Trade Organization's alleged disregard for Third World nations and the environment. Through civil and not so civil disobedience, protestors demanded that these issues be placed on the agenda. But during the massive "direct action" designed to disrupt the WTO's notoriously private proceedings, there was hardly a Timberland or cornrow in the crowd of Birkenstocks and blond hair.

Between November 30 and December 3, protestors prevented WTO delegates from entering their meetings. Their sheer numbers and unpredictability stunned an overwhelmed police force. All told, protestors caused \$2.5 million worth of damage to downtown Seattle, and more than 500 were arrested. More importantly, the national media ate it up. Cameras captured everything from roving bands of protestors dipped in jet-black body suits to the life-sized puppets some toted.

So while the world wondered what alternate universe this discontent emerged from, a few members of the hip-hop community began organizing for their own mass protests. For them, Seattle was an epiphany—a realization that they were going to have to team up with some of those wild-ass white kids if they wanted their causes to get the same national coverage. They designated the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia and the Democratic National Convention in LA as the battleground. And with the element of surprise gone, their action would have to be just as choreographed as the conventions themselves.

"We had seen a trend of mostly white organizations and white-led movements pulling together the mass



From top: DNC delegates; march against occidental Petroleum; LA protester demonstrates outside DNC; Limited support for LAPD.

protests in Seattle," says Rachel LaForest, a senior at Hunter College and a project coordinator for New York City-based Student Liberation Action Movement (SLAM). "We felt the people targeted by the issues being brought to the table most were people of color, and we wanted to make sure we were represented in Philly."

Fellow organizer Peter Cheng adds, "We chose to represent issues that people of color were already working with in their communities" like the prison-industrial complex, the death penalty and the unjust incarceration of political prisoners.

In late April, 20 organizers from SLAM—a small, predominantly Black, Asian and Latino grassroots organization that focuses on the criminal-justice system—united with 10 other groups to form the August First Direct Action Coalition (AFDAC). As the name of the loosely organized collective suggests, the first of August would be D-Day. That meant that the crew would have a little more than 90 days to pull off a massive protest in a city determined to avoid the embarrassment of another Seattle.

SLAM's first step was to recruit foot soldiers among its members and the people who occasionally attended their weekly meetings. "We put together propaganda that would appeal to our young people—not just a sheet of facts," LaForest notes, pointing to a colorful flyer depicting an oversized, dreadlocked activist crouching among cartoon buildings. One side of the flyer shouts, "Resist!" The other urges heads to converge in Philly to "confront the US criminal-justice system."

SLAM leaders admit it was difficult to attract interest because Seattle was perceived by many as a whites-only protest. And given the everyday bullshit they endured with five-O, many were wary of placing themselves in direct confrontation with Philadelphia's police. "It's a lot to ask people to get the shit kicked out of them on purpose," Laforest says with a grin. Nonetheless, SLAM plowed ahead and was able to recruit about 50 heads.

With images of police beatdowns in Seattle still fresh, members traveled from New York to the North Philly "Convergence Center" for training sessions in civil disobedience. This covered everything from how to form a blockade to how to react when the police wilded out. SLAM also helped establish a separate "People of Color Convergence Center" at a nearby church, which

minority activists used to discuss their concerns about the upcoming protests amongst themselves.

In June, SLAM's activity became more frenzied. There were funds to be raised, buses to be rented, housing to secure and press conferences to be planned. SLAM also sent delegates to Philly to coordinate with leaders of AFDAC.

But even with all the teamwork, organizers were faced with racial tension. According to SLAM leader Kai Lumumba, her dealings with the mostly white group of protest organizers were affected by subtle prejudice. "We were working with a lot of people who weren't aware of their racism and their privilege," she says. "I was trying to make sure that didn't creep up in the organizing."

Jacqueline Ambrosini, a lead organizer for Philadelphia Direct Action Network, who is white, seconds Lumumba's assessment. As a member of the August First collective, she worked closely with SLAM delegates. "People have to question white privilege and white leadership—more than just making room but actual power sharing. SLAM was amazing because they took such a powerful leadership role."

By July 31, downtown Philadelphia was essentially sealed off from anyone who wasn't officially involved with the RNC. Mayor John Street refused to allow protestors anywhere near the First Union Center, where Republicans would nominate George W. Bush and Philadelphia would establish itself as a first-class host.

As a result, AFDAC's strategy mirrored the Seattle protestors': Interrupt the convention by preventing RNC delegates from making it to the convention site. Groups of 15 to 20 would block routes they expected delegates to be traveling. Tactical squads would communicate with the main Convergence Center across town. A medic squad would provide first aid. And a 'flying' squad would scurry from protest to protest, lending reinforcements. Indeed, SLAM and other August First participants were ready to rumble. They just didn't know just how ready Philly cops were to fight back.

Despite all of the attention to detail, the August 1 protest didn't go as planned. A last-minute police raid on the Convergence Center and the confiscation of thousands of Seattle-style puppets forced protestors to march



From top: LA protester rallies against brutality; cops ready to rumble; President Clinton bids farewell.

GETTIN' NEW

FOR REPUBLICANS AND DEMOCRATS, NATIONAL CONVENTIONS ARE PERFECT PLACES TO FLIP THE SCRIPT

The Republican and Democratic National Conventions have become elaborate infomercials. They're designed to entice voters to buy a product that looks great on TV but invariably has screws missing when the package arrives. And if voters don't buy the message, there's plenty of time to create a new-and-improved one.

Take the Republicans' 1996 show. Just four years ago, the Grand Old Party didn't mask its anti-people-of-color agenda. Bob Dole was the presidential nominee, but syndicated conservative commentator and former Richard Nixon speechwriter Pat Buchanan was the star. An unabashed Confederate flag-waver, Buchanan wrapped his attack on the "flood of illegals" in the American flag and American values.

Gone this year is the brown bashing. In fact, the Republican National Convention dais held more color than a Crayola 64-pack. George P. Bush (George W.'s half-Mexican nephew) spoke in English and Spanish about how proud he was of his uncle. And Colin Powell received a war hero's welcome when he climbed the stage, although many in the crowd sat on their hands when he spoke about the need for the Grand Old Party to reach out to people of color consistently—not just during election years.

After eight years of Bill Clinton, the Democrats have made minor moral adjustments. But in the case of people of color, their party's core message remains the same. In fact, for 2000, Democrats upped the ante by allowing Harold E. Ford Jr., a 30-year-old, two-time Tennessee congressman, to give the keynote address. Ford spoke about the convention's significance for young people of color, pointing out that "this election is more about us, if not solely about us." That may be the most important thing to come out of both of the infomercials.

—MICHAEL DATCHER

PLANTATION LULLABIES

HOW THE RNC USED A MODERN-DAY MINSTREL SHOW TO ATTRACT WHITE VOTERS



Eleven years ago, Aunt Jemima lost weight and straightened her hair. But even with the makeover, her image is reminiscent of plantation days. And she isn't the only slave stereotype used to push products. Images of Uncle Ben and Rastus, the chef on the Cream of Wheat box, continue to this day. These caricatures are employed to symbolically recall a past when Blacks *had* to serve whites.

Fortunately, there's no more minstrelsy in the new millennium. That is, if you don't count this year's Republican National Convention.

A minstrel show has never looked better—break dancers, a Black preacher, a gospel choir, Chaka Khan and Brian McKnight. They were all onstage to entertain the predominately white audience.

Why were these folks on parade? That's the \$6 million question. Observers speculated that Republicans were trying to attract voters of color. After all, Powell stressed inclusion and the need for affirmative action (which the party opposes). But that's too obvious. With their record, Republicans know Blacks and Latinos wouldn't fall for *that* ploy.

The GOP had another agenda. After losing moderate white voters to Bill Clinton in '92, Republicans are now trying to win them back. These voters will be a deciding factor between a Republican or Democratic president. So, the Republicans did what they had to do. They put a few Black faces on display to prove to white suburbanites that George W. Bush is truly a "compassionate conservative."

It was a win-win situation for the GOP. And what will the Negroes get in return? Perhaps a chance to serve in the big house.

—ANN-MARIE NICHOLSON



From top: Protesters light it up; LAPD out in force; Rep. J.C. Watts (R-OK) shines at the RNC.

without the attention-grabbing mannequins. Even worse, a well-organized, \$10 million police presence stymied the organized confusion so crucial to Seattle's success.

Although SLAM maintains that the coalition achieved its mission by holding up traffic in downtown Philadelphia for five hours, many dismissed the RNC protests as ineffective. While some of the 10,000 protestors indulged in sporadic acts of violence, the RNC's show went on as scheduled. During the four-day convention, Jake made some 400 arrests (including one SLAM participant) on charges ranging from obstructing a highway to aggravated assault on a police officer. And the national media portrayed it all as chaos without cause.

While RNC protestors were being held for days with sky-high bails, another group of organizers was bracing for their own showdown with the Democrats and the LAPD. Although social justice groups had long let Democrats off the hook, Seattle had an indelible effect. Groups like 300-member, Cali-based Youth Organizing Communities (YOC) began wondering if the Democrats were fair game. "The initial question was why protest the Democrats? And if we do it, are we going to get lost in the shuffle?" recalls YOC leader Luis Sanchez. "We were also worried about the potential violence—especially being young people of color." Ultimately, according to Sanchez, the sorry state of education for poor people of color compelled the predominantly Latino organization to protest.

So, in April, YOC transformed itself into the nation's largest street team, going into the 'hoods of South Central, East LA and Pico-Union to inform people about the upcoming protests. Group members also doled out hundreds of flyers at local high schools and on city buses.

Then came the music. YOC held two summer concerts featuring local hip-hop acts, graffiti exhibitions, speakers and information booths. Sanchez estimates that up to 500 heads showed up to each. "Most people tend to think protests are boring," he says. "We try to use [our] culture as a weapon; it seems more celebratory."

Although LA's protestors were reping causes similar to Philly's, they didn't duplicate the Seattle model. Instead, organizers opted for a number of mass rallies that would take place from

August 5 to the 17th. Major themes included environmental racism, police brutality and corporate greed. Instead of trying to shut the DNC down, organizers obtained permits. They would rally right in the parking lot of the Staples Center where the convention was to take place. And if all went according to plan, they would upstage the main event.

YOC, like co-producers of an album full of cameos, sprinkled their expertise—and name—throughout most of the major protests. This included an August 14 march against Occidental Petroleum, which they accused of abusing Colombia's U'wa people; an August 15 rally to protest LA Metropolitan Transit Authority's plan to cut spending on public buses on which Latinos depend; and an August 17 march against the US Navy military exercises in Vieques, Puerto Rico.

But a march to the governor's office on the morning of August 15 would be their crowning achievement. Despite a gun-wielding police force aggravated by anarchists, "Justice for Youth, End the Racist Setup" would have to go on.

Tensions were sweltering like the Left Coast sun on the day that YOC had worked so tirelessly to plan. Two-thousand cops from the LAPD and 2,700 highway patrolmen were on duty. And the night before, anarchists had wilded out at a Rage Against the Machine concert in the Staples Center parking lot.

Police shut down the concert after an anarchist group attempted to scale a fence and storm the convention. Cops blasted them off the fence with rounds of air-compressed capsules. Then troopers on horseback fired randomly into the crowd, which spilled into the street. Meanwhile, small groups of protestors scorched American flags and screamed "Fuck the police!" and "Al Gore, corporate whore!" Only six arrests were made, but many complained of excessive force. The American Civil Liberties Union later announced plans to file a civil rights suit against the LAPD on the grounds that police targeted members of the media during the night's unrest.

Understandably, YOC members were nervous about their 9 A.M. march to Governor Gray Davis's LA office. "We were worried after Monday night," Sanchez recalls. "Ours was the first march after that, and we were all people of color. So we didn't know how the [police] would react." Still, YOC didn't let trigger-happy cops deter them.

As ghetto birds darted about over-



"WE WERE ABLE TO INJECT THE ISSUES THAT AFFECT PEOPLE OF COLOR INTO PREDOMINANTLY WHITE ORGANIZATIONS THAT NEVER REALLY DID WORK WITH RACIAL JUSTICE." —PETER CHENG



One of Cali's finest raises a fist in protest; Anarchists wild out; cops throw their weight around.

head, the crowd of 1,000 mostly Latino high school students set off their two-hour march to the Governor's office. Since YOC had a permit for the march and had alerted LAPD officials of their route, cops, highway patrolmen and county sheriffs flanked protestors on either side, rocking full riot gear. A few even displayed the air-capsule guns they toted the night before.

Filling the entire street, the marchers snaked their way through Downtown. The hip-hop truck rode alongside the marchers bumping DMX's "Ruff Ryder's Anthem" and KRS-One's "Sound of da Police."

Just before arriving at Davis's office, the protestors passed through a mile-long phalanx of more police. YOC members responded by raising their left fists and quieting the marchers and the music. The crowd of 1,000 kids completed their journey in silence with their fists raised. Police could only watch through tinted sunglasses.

After reaching the office, YOC delegates delivered their demands to a representative of the governor, who was not there. Po-po made no arrests during the march, though some 200 arrests were made during the DNC.

Although YOC has yet to receive a response from the Governor's office, Sanchez says that's besides the point. "We were there to demonstrate that this was a group that was a statewide network," he contends, "that we were going to take on people we felt were threatening educational justice. We were going to continue to organize beyond the DNC."

So what should we make of Philly and LA? Did SLAM and YOC enlighten the world to problems that plague the hip-hop generation? Or did a relative lack of press coverage—perhaps due to the peaceful nature of the marches—prevent the two groups from getting their message to the masses?

Both SLAM and YOC view their actions as overwhelming victories. "We were able to inject the issues that affect people of color into predominantly white organizations that never really did work with racial justice. Now, we have environmental groups discussing these issues," explains SLAM's Peter Cheng.

"It was about networking and creating a larger movement that goes way beyond the DNC," adds Sanchez. "We showed support for these other groups, and now they're gonna be there for us." Ⓢ