

Rap Artist Snoop to Parody '92 LA Unrest

Written by NiKKi ID1554

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The "L.A. Riot Spectacular"? What's next "The Columbine Jamboree"? "The 9/11 Extravaganza"?

Hip-hop rap artist Snoop Dogg poses this question at the start of Marc Klasfeld's debut feature film about the 1992 Los Angeles riots, which premiered in April at New York's Tribeca Film Festival and is in negotiations for DVD release.

It's an obvious question: "The L.A. Riot Spectacular" is a laugh-inducing take on a catastrophe, a satire on an event that, literally and metaphorically, scarred Los Angeles. It's also a question that writer-director Klasfeld asked himself when he began production on the film three years ago.

"I was nervously approaching my casting agent at William Morris thinking, "Who's going to want to be in this kind of a film?" recalls Klasfeld, who was in film school at New York University when the riots erupted and immediately set his sights on a project about what he watched, wide-eyed, on television that day. The agent, he recalls, gave him a one-word answer: "Everyone."

Snoop signed on first. Klasfeld, who has directed music videos for hip-hop and rap notables Nelly, and Eminem along with other genre groups like Bon Jovi, and "N Sync, had his heart set on the west coast rap artist to narrate the film. "For authenticity reasons," he says, "it had to be someone who was from that era." He approached rap artist Snoop with a pitch: This film would, á la Richard Pryor or George Carlin, underscore the absurdity of a calamity by lampooning it.

Blacks, whites, Jews, Mexicans and Koreans would be fair game for parody. Rodney King would rarely be featured without a bottle of "False Hope" malt liquor in his hands. The residents of Simi Valley, where the police officers charged in King's beating were tried and acquitted, would sport swastikas on their mailboxes and watch German-language television. Ratings-hungry news anchors would school South Central gang members on visually pleasing riot tactics. And sportscaster Michael Buffer would arrive at Florence and Normandie to deliver his signature rallying cry: "Let's get ready to rumble!"

"Snoop just looked at me," continues Klasfeld, "and said, "Cool. I'm in." "

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Snoop also puts his rhyming skills to work in "The L.A. Riot Spectacular." In a scene Klasfeld says the rapper considers "one of the shining moments of his career," he stands before a courtroom full of police officers after the Rodney King verdict and delivers a scathing performance of west coast legendary gangsta rap group N.W.A's classic, controversial 1988 track "[Expletive] Tha Police."

The film's soundtrack, a mélange of the nostalgic and the contemporary, arranged by Grammy-nominated musical supervisor Frankie Pine; also features Snoop's stellar cover of gangsta rap artist Ice-T's landmark song "Colors," the title track from Dennis Hopper's 1988 film about the L.A. gang scene.

The rapper's role in "The L.A. Riot Spectacular" complements his diversifying résumé: In another Tribeca premiere — "The Tenants," an adaptation of the Bernard Malamud novel — Snoop is a militant black writer who feuds with his Jewish neighbor, played by Dylan McDermott. Snoop is also at work, with fellow rap artists Kurupt and Daz Dillinger, on a new album with Tha Dogg Pound, and has paired with the Game for the "How the West Was One" tour.

"The L.A. Riot Spectacular" benefits from tragedies having their own sort of statute of limitations: 13 years later, jokes about the riots are less scandalous than they were.

That doesn't mean, however, that the film won't raise eyebrows — especially in L.A., where a date for its premiere has yet to be set, and where Klasfeld anticipates "strong reactions on both sides of the fence."

"As long as it stirs up dialogue, the film is doing what it's supposed to do," Klasfeld asserts. "The film's message," he adds, citing Rodney King's famous words, "is — as corny as it's become — can't we all just get along?"

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