

Violence reaches Rochester in wake of verdict

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Complaining that his brother had just been arrested for throwing a rock at someone, one black teenager surveyed the crowds downtown Friday, May 1, concluding:

"Everyone's cutting up over Rodney King."

It remained unclear whether the acquittal of four white Los Angeles police officers accused of beating King was the uppermost concern among citizens who turned violent across the nation last week.

Yet it was certain that the verdict in the King beating sparked waves of urban violence unlike anything seen in the United States since the 1960s.

Local unrest following the King verdict has prompted Bishop Matthew H. Clark to convene a diocesan Task Force on Societal Injustice. The bishop announces the task force in his "Along the Way" column in this week's *Catholic Courier*.

The task force will be charged with addressing "the underlying issues of racism, poverty and urban neglect," the bishop wrote. He added that the task force "will include members of our urban and social ministry staffs, parish ministers and others with relevant expertise."

The violence that swept the country arrived in Rochester on the afternoon of May 1, when groups of people skirmished with police and private citizens alike. Police — many dressed in riot gear — used vehicle, foot and horse patrols to control random incidents in the crowds gathering for their daily commutes to and from the city.

Midtown Plaza closed early because



Violent outbursts stemming from the acquittal of four Los Angeles police officers in the Rodney King case touched Rochester last week. On Friday, May 1, a group of angry youths overturned this police van at the intersection of West Main and North Washington streets.

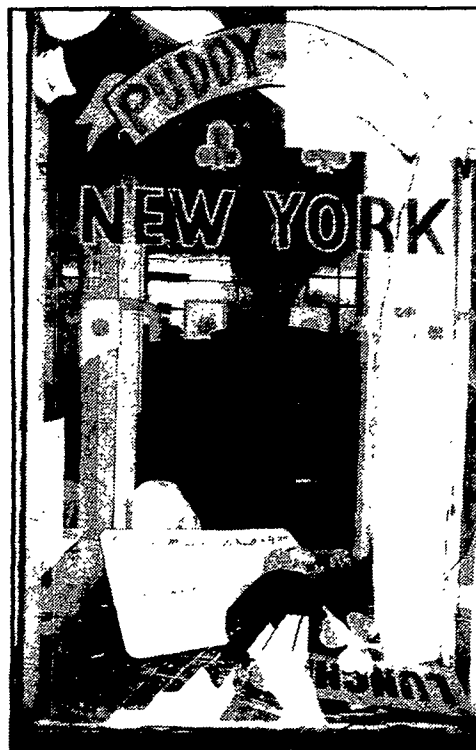
Erik Kunkel/Photo intern

of the unrest, and one police van was overturned. The city imposed a 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew for anyone under 18, although no one was charged with curfew violations.

By dawn on Saturday, May 2, 39 people had been arrested and nine citizens had been injured, including one who suffered a fractured skull. Meanwhile, vandals had done almost \$10,000 worth of damage to area businesses and city property, according to Sergeant Pat Cona, an aide in the office of the city police chief. Most of the arrests stemmed from charges of disorderly conduct, she added.

Emmett Michie, 34, a local poet and student at Monroe Community College, was the first reported victim of the skirmishes on Main Street. While waiting for a bus, Michie, who is white, was punched in the face by four black teenagers.

Michie suffered a bloody nose, and his attackers escaped before police



Puddy-Bab's New York Deli was among the stores along Rochester's Main Street to be vandalized during scuffles May 1.

Bridget Burch, a parishioner at Immaculate Conception Parish, 445 Frederick Douglass St., watched the unrest in downtown from her Main Street office. The random violence occurred because "everyone had riot on the brain," observed Burch, who is black.

Nonetheless, Burch — like many Rochester residents, both black and white — expressed disbelief that the jury had acquitted the four white Los Angeles police officers captured on videotape as they beat King in 1991.

"I cannot understand how anyone looking at that tape could not conclude that the police used excessive force," she said.

Burch and other diocesan black Catholics expressed a range of emotions about the violence that broke out in Los Angeles and other U.S. cities following the April 29 announcement of the King verdicts.

"People are tired, are angry and they've had enough," Burch acknowledged. "You can only push people so far before they resort to violence."

Those comments were echoed by Cedric Lambert, a parishioner at St. Joseph's Parish in Rush and a member of the Board of Directors for the diocesan Office of Black Ministries.

"It stunk," Burch said of the King verdict. "It was a license to beat up on a black man."

Like Burch, Lambert found the violence that followed the verdict regrettable, but understandable. Like their counterparts of the 1960s, the latest urban riots were "terrible," he said.

But Lambert predicted that such violence will only occur again and again because the nation has not recognized the need to get frustrated and impoverished minority youths "into the system."

could apprehend them. Only moments before he was attacked, Michie told the *Catholic Courier*, he had been complaining that he felt the police were "hassling everybody."

Michie said he believed the violence he suffered was encouraged not so much by racial tensions as by the presence of large numbers of police and media representatives.

"They set the stage, they wrote the script," he said, adding that "the only words I heard about Rodney King were told to microphones." Michie added that as he nursed his bloody nose, "black people walked up to me and apologized like it was their fault."



Diocesan Appointments

Bishop Matthew H. Clark has announced the following diocesan appointments, which are effective June 30, 1992.

Father Victor W. Bartolotta Jr., from priest intern at St. Joseph's Church in Penfield, to chaplain at Nazareth College of Rochester.

Father Joseph R. Catanise, from parochial vicar at St. Charles Borromeo Church in Rochester, to chaplain at State University of New York College at Brockport.

Father William Donnelly, from parochial vicar and religious education administrator at St. Mary's

Church, Canandaigua, to pastor at St. Mary's Church, Elmira.

Father Robert Caudio, from pastor at St. Monica's Church, Rochester, to pastor at St. Anne's Church, Palmyra, and St. Gregory's Church, Marion.

Father David N. Gramkee, from pastor of Eastside Catholic Church in Elmira, to pastor of St. Patrick's Church in Seneca Falls.

Father Anthony P. Mugavero, from parochial vicar at St. Theodore's Church in Rochester, to pastor of St. Bridget's Church in Rochester.

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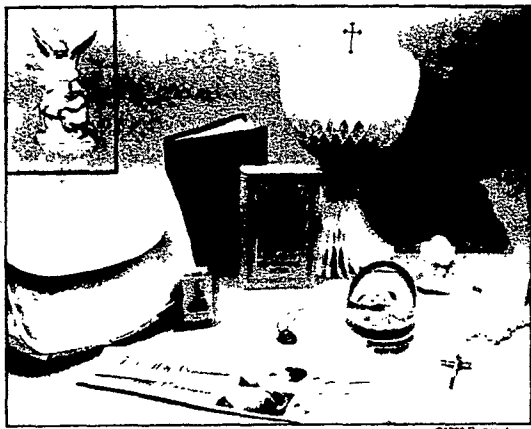
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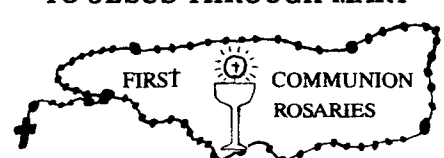
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