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The Fire This Time
Part I
The Ordeal of Ernie Andrews

Due to events in Los Angeles and Simi in early May, the continuation of *A Death in the Family: The Rise and Fall of the American Song* will be postponed until September.

God gave Noah the rainbow sign,
No more water, the fire next time.
– slave song, quoted by James Baldwin in 1962

John F. Kennedy. Robert F. Kennedy. Martin Luther King. Malcolm X. Mary Jo Kopechne.

And a burglar-in-chief named Richard M. Nixon walked off Scot free.

I thought at the time Gerald Ford made the flagrant pardon deal with him, How can they henceforth make moral preachments to the ghetto poor? How can they tell people starved for education and health care and furniture and food and simple amenities that they must not steal, must respect the law, when the law is conspicuously flouted at the highest levels? "Your president is not a crook" was his largest lie of all, so bizarre that I remember exactly where I was when I heard it, just putting my foot out of the car in a gas station in Laguna Beach as it came over the radio.

And gradually in the years since then the chief burglar has been elevated back to a status of national sage, interviewed with respect by the anchorthings on television, pontificating with unembarrassed moral authority.

Tell them in the ghetto that they must respect the law.

And, later, the parade of thieves and pillagers of the Ronald Reagan presidency -- if you've seen one redwood, you've seen 'em all -- ripping off the people and the land and future generations, leaving them with bared earth and dying oceans and an incomprehensible debt. Rescinding the civil rights advances of the Lyndon Johnson years; gutting the student loans just when people were going on to graduate level, the very people we need to compete with the educated workers of other countries; breaking the air controllers union and then the other unions, getting more than 200 people killed in the air over Cerritos, California; getting those young Marines killed in Lebanon, (what's a couple hundred more deaths?); removing the last vestiges of control from radio broadcasters; more black bag jobs; government involved to its eyes in the dope traffic; handing the whole declining nation over to an oil wildcatter who sends some more American boys out to die in defense of "freedom" and "democracy" in Kuwait, because this new chief burglar has oil interests of his own, making sure his boy isn't prosecuted when the deregulated savings and loans go down, taking 120 billion of the dollars of Americans to bail them out and let the thieves go off on their boats and airplanes in leisure. Oh the theft, the twelve years of rampant national rape. From the Latin, *rapio rapere*, to seize and carry off.

The Willie Horton campaign commercial, playing on the primitive fears of the white bigots, watch out the nigger will get you . . . But that's not new.

The chief of the LAPD at the time of the Watts riot was William H. Parker. During the riot Parker said, "It is estimated that by 1970, 45 percent of the metropolitan area of Los Angeles will be Negro . . . If you want any protection for your home and family . . . you're going to have to get in and support a strong Police Department. If you don't, come 1970, God help you." He also ascribed crime by Hispanics to their "not being too far removed from the wild tribes of . . . the inner mountains of Mexico."

Parker instituted what he called proactive policing. Don't bother to look it up in the dictionary; it isn't there. It's cop talk. It means that instead of acting after the fact, L.A. cops go out in search of trouble, trying to find criminals before they act. It is a basic principle of Anglo-American law that you cannot prosecute anyone for what he is thinking or planning -- only for what he has done. The Parker philosophy empowered police to hassle anybody they wish, whenever they wish. This means pulling over your car any time they feel like it, especially if you're black.

All that proactive policing has achieved is a broad public hostility to the police and a paranoid us-against-them mentality in the latter. And L.A. has one of the highest crime rates in the country.

I am fascinated by the way cops talk. Interviewed on TV, they use a hideous vocabulary all their own, expressions such as "in the compliance mode," meaning they've beaten the guy half to death and he's comatose on the ground.

In television interviews you'll hear them say such things as "We approached the individual . . ." Whatever happened to the words "man" and "woman" and "boy" and "girl"?

Trying to soften their image for brutality, the Los Angeles cops will sometimes use the euphemism "gentleman".

"The individual was naked. At that point in time he put his hand in his armpit and the officers basically thought he had a weapon and shot the gentlemen seventy-seven times until he was in the compliance mode. Internal Affairs made a determination that it was a good shoot." I exaggerate only slightly. They did indeed, a few years ago, shoot to death a nut case who was stark naked.

I have a strong suspicion that this use of language is condoned if not actually encouraged in the Los Angeles cops as a means to detach themselves from the public. This kind of abstract vocabulary permits them to demonized and abuse people without conscience. Actually, the preferred LAPD word for civilians seems to be "assholes."

Some of the Hispanic community in Los Angeles would like more of the police to know Spanish. And that's a good idea, but I'd be happy if they could even speak English. If I were trying to clean up the LAPD, the first thing I would do would be to ban the use of such sanitizing words as "individual" and "gentleman" and make them say what they mean: "I shot the woman." Furthermore, I would make any use whatsoever of racial epithets -- in radio or computer communications or even

in conversation -- grounds for summary dismissal, the police union be damned.

But this indifference to the law goes on at all official levels. How about the latest burglar in chief ordering an invasion of Panama to arrest a man for a crime not committed on American soil? What ever happened to national sovereignty? The spin doctors hushed up the deaths of innocent Panamanian civilians in one poor neighborhood -- 10,000 of them, according of some estimates, and mostly black. They don't matter. What matters is a decisive action, so that they'll stop saying you're a wimp.

Gordon Liddy getting parts in movies. Edwin Meese walking around Scot free, now a commentator on CNN's *Crossfire*, Oliver North walking around Scot free, getting money for his lectures about "patriotism," John Poindexter walking around Scot free, Bruce Hershenson and Patrick Buchanan ranting that it's a matter of law and order. And that disgrace to journalism Robert Novack saying that giving help to bleeding Los Angeles is rewarding the looters and arsonists, when it is to help the victims of the looters and arsonists.

And the national medical "system" faces meltdown within four years, with doctors giving up their practices to become carpenters and run pet shops, because they can no longer deal with the insurance companies that now control "private" medical coverage and fight every doctor, every pharmacist, over every penny of legitimate claim.

Then there's the obscenity of the lies of the election campaign. Paul Tsongas saying that had he lived in Canada, he would be dead because the bone marrow transplant that saved his life was not available there. The operation was invented in Toronto at the Ontario Cancer Institute, and the research that developed it was done with the help of funding from the Canadian government. Question, therefore: is Paul Tsongas merely an ignoramus or a conscious and unblushing liar?

A black guy in a wheelchair begging in a gas station in Los Angeles, the stump of his right leg, amputated at the calf, covered in a white sock. A black motorist ahead of me gives him some money. So do I. He has a good face. He is in his forties. Where did he leave the rest of the leg? In Viet Nam? "I got burned out in the riot," he says, and his voice is intelligent, and I weigh the possibility that I am being conned and believe him. This guy's got no "socialized medicine." The chief burglar does, though: he goes to Bethesda. Free. Not quite. You pay for it.

The whole country, indeed the whole world, watched the Rodney King trial and its bloody aftermath. If you wanted to see Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* (which was ripped off in the novel and movie *Jaws*) in action, you should have read the bleating in California about what this altered image of L.A. would do to the tourist trade. In all the hullabaloo, people elsewhere didn't hear about another L.A. police scandal.

In February, 1991, a Compton police officer named Alfred Skiles Jr. shot to death two brothers, members of the Los Angeles Samoan community. Only days after the acquittal of the cops in the Rodney King case, the jury deadlocked 9 to 3 in favor of acquittal, and then in June a Superior Court judge refused to order a new trial. He claimed, as cops always do, that he was defending himself, and nine jurors believed him. But he shot these men 19 times, mostly in the back. If he used a revolver, he had to reload three times, and then resume blasting. What were the two brothers doing during the silence while he reloaded? Continuing to attack? Or lying there, dead or semi-dead? A brother of the two killed men claimed Skiles ordered them down on their knees before he started shooting. Nineteen times! And he got off Scot free.

Incredibly, for all the killings by LAPD officers -- and this doesn't count the L.A. County Sheriff's department, which has been under investigation for its own use of force -- Skiles was the first law enforcement officer in the county charged with a killing while on duty in ten years. He was charged only with manslaughter at that. Skiles has since then retired, saying the emotional strain of the trial had left him medically disabled. Ah gee.

Sgt Stacey Koon, described even by Daryl Gates as "a legend in his own mind", turns up on television smug about his acquittal. He is amazing: the only man I ever saw who could strut sitting down. He says in an oddly simpering voice that he enjoys his new-found celebrity, and refers to Rodney King as a Mandingo. And then, incredibly, he says he's not a racist! And Rodney King, broken and on the verge of tears, pleads, "Can't we get along?" Which of the two is the real man? No contest.

The shocking judicial system of Ventura County, where I live and where those four bully boys were tried. The impanelling system for jurors is stacked. They are pre-selected, before the lawyers ever get to them, for malleability and stupidity. It is almost impossible for *anybody* to get a fair trial in Ventura County, whose population, incidentally, is 2 percent black.

Ojai has only 20 blacks in a population of 7,500. One of them is a highly intelligent young man who works part-time for me on the distribution of the *Jazzletter*. I keep telling him he *must* get interested in the political process. I want him to go to college, and I think he's listening.

Seeing me listen to Nat Cole and Art Tatum and McCoy Tyner he says to me one day, "Gene, I didn't know blacks could play the piano."

The Venturee Countee sheriff's cops hassle him fairly regularly. Just another little nigger. The whole system is structured to convince him he is worthless. Didn't know blacks could play the piano.

Look at Oliver North and John Poindexter and Gordon Liddy and Stacey Koon walking around Scot free.

Then tell those Mandingos in the ghetto that they have to obey the law.

"How close did it come, Ernie?" I asked.

"Come on outside," he said. We walked out his front door. The house is a sort of dark Wedgewood blue. It has wrought-iron grills on its windows and all its doors. It is a modest house among other modest houses, but the neighborhood is slipping slowly downward with the neglect that city govern-

ments have traditionally gifted to black neighborhoods. Not many white people ever get into black neighborhoods. They don't know anybody there.

Ernie Andrews pointed. His house is almost at the crest of a sloping street, and from the little fenced garden in front of it, he indicated a business neighborhood about three blocks away. "All that," he said. "It was all on fire. The sky was orange. And the smoke! Everywhere."

Ernie has four sons and a daughter, ten grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren. His eight-year-old grandson, Mark Andrews Jr., who lives across the street, came and went as Ernie and I talked. He was one of the children who had to watch the horror. One can only wonder what it did to him.

We went back into the house.

The ever-popular New Orleans-to-Chicago legend of jazz genesis to the contrary, there was jazz in Los Angeles before 1920, played by Jelly Roll Morton, Kid Ory, and others. They and various local musicians made Central Avenue a greenhouse of the new music before the Jazz Age was born -- and before Louis Armstrong set its direction in Chicago.

Black music history was being written in a small area centered on Central Avenue, a street immortalized in Lionel Hampton's *Central Avenue Breakdown*. By 1920, as the scholar and pianist Ted Gioia tells us in his new book *West Coast Jazz*, 40 percent of the black population of Los Angeles lived within a few blocks on either side of this vital thoroughfare between 11th and 42nd Streets. The black population of L.A. had been doubling every 20 years since 1900, so that by the World War II years this area was a city within a city, a culture unto itself.

"Entertainment was just one small part of what Central Avenue was all about," Gioia writes, "and jazz was just one small piece of the entertainment picture, co-existing over the years with R&B, song-and-dance, comedy, blues, revues, shake dancing, vaudeville, and the like. The Club Alabam, the best known of the nightspots that dotted the landscape, is sometimes spoken of by jazz writers as a West Coast Birdland or Village Vanguard, but it was both more and less. The Alabam featured lavish revues that covered the gamut of the entertainment spectrum, and though the jazz might be spectacular -- with Charles Mingus, Dexter Gordon, or Art Pepper playing in the house band, it no doubt was -- jazz was still just a small part of the show."

Black celebrities, among them Jackie Robinson, Joe Louis, and Bill Robinson, were there, often staying at the Dunbar, an elegant hotel next door to the Alabam. Duke Ellington stayed there when he came to Hollywood to be in the 1930 film *Check and Double Check*. Later, so did Louis Armstrong, Jimmie Lunceford, Don Redman, Sy Oliver, and Cozy Cole.

Two doors beyond the Alabam was the Downbeat, where Howard McGhee's newly organized bebop band, the first modern jazz group on the coast, performed several months before Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker arrived for their historic gig at Billy Berg's. Art Tatum played in the neighborhood. Across the street was the Last Word, where Hampton Hawes played on the night of his high school graduation. A little south of there was the Memo, and Ivie Anderson's Chicken Shack, a restaurant favored by musicians. There were more. And that is not counting the after-hours clubs.

No one thought anything of it when white people came to hear the music, among them Mae West, Lana Turner, Frank Sinatra, Ava Gardner, Orson Welles, John Steinbeck, and William Randolph Hearst. And the entertainment roared around the clock during the war, when defense plants worked three shifts and workers would drop in on their way home.

At first you couldn't get the new bebop records. They were carried to the coast by railway porters and sold like bootleg whisky, sometimes out of a shoeshine stand by a man named Emery Byrd, who also supplied Mexican green and heroin. His nickname was Moose the Mooche. Charlie Parker made it the title of one of his compositions.

Ted Gioia's account is augmented by a documentary film often seen on PBS. Centered on the life and times of Ernie Andrews, it is called *Blues for Central Avenue.*

Jimmy Witherspoon, himself one of the great blues singers, said once that he considers Ernie Andrews the greatest singer he's ever heard. This is considerable praise from a qualified commentator for a man whose career has been characterized by long stretches of obscurity, neglect, and frustration broken by sudden sunbursts of recognition. Pianist and arranger Nat Pierce and drummer Frank Capp, with whose Juggernaut band Andrews has performed a good deal during the last ten years, share Witherspoon's esteem for the singer. Yet you can search the standard jazz dictionaries and encyclopedias in vain for Ernie's name. And one of the few that does take note of his existence dismisses him in six lines.

"I was born in Philadelphia on Christmas Day, 1927," Ernie said back in the house. He brought me a cup of coffee, set it on a coffee table, and sat down on a sofa facing me. The living room was pleasantly cluttered, with a studio spinet piano against one wall and stereo and videotape equipment on another. "I left Philadelphia when I was nine, went to Louisiana, and lived with my mother's folks. A little place called Generett, where I stayed four years, maybe five."

Ernie on a stage has enormous energy. He can shout "Well!" on the flat third with more conviction than anyone you ever heard. But his speech is quiet, spaced and paced, the voice rich but soft. The letter *r* is always softened to an *ah* sound, probably a vestige of his years in the South. Singers usually soften *r* after a vowel anyway; it is not one of the prettier sounds in the English language. Ernie is trim and has a mustache, coppery skin, and hair that is surprisingly free of grey for a man of 65.

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"Bunk Johnson was teaching for the unified school system. I started out playing drums in school there with him. And then I left Louisiana and I came here to Los Angeles the last of 1944 with my mother. My mother and father were separated. My mother was a chef. She could cook. She could knit, she did a lot of things in her life, supporting me. My grandmother was a great cook too. She cooked for one family for 53 years.

"My mother was a wonderful singer. Her mother before her was a wonderful singer. Her brothers were great singers, church singers. My father came from Virginia, and he was a wonderful singer. His sisters were great singers.

"I went to school here. I went into Thomas Jefferson High School. Sam Brown had the band there. I took a drummer's class, but I never did get to play with that band.

"Drumming's a lot of work," Ernie said with a little laugh. "You've got four things going for you. Right foot, left foot, right hand, left hand. Oh man! Ambidextrous! Oh man, you've gotta get with it now! You've gotta tune 'em up, make 'em sing! So it wasn't hard for me to put it down for singing. It was easy.

"Starting out on drums made me a kind of time addict. I'm a stickler for time. If a drummer lays back too far, I have a problem with that. It labors me, because it keeps me pulling all the time, something I want and am not getting. But then if you get too far in front of me, then I'm in trouble again. Buddy Rich, God bless him, God rest his soul. Buddy would run over you. What a great player. But you had to get on your little pony to stay up with Buddy.

"I was six years with Buddy with Harry James.

"And then I had one of the most broken time players, but he was always there on one. Sonny Payne. He'd stick some things in, you had to be thinking all the time. Frank Butler was one of the very fine players. I was quite a few years with Frank. He was one of my favorites too. Larence Marable, he used to live next door to my wife and me on 23rd Street. He'd be next door with a number 12 tub as a bass drum, snare drum, cymbals, sock, sticks and brushes. He'd wear me out all day long, playing the drums all day in the garage.

"For a while I worked in the Lincoln theater as an usher. I worked all the amateur shows. That's where I was found by Joe Green, the songwriter. He opened a label with me, G and G for Green and Green, his father. He wrote and I recorded *Wrap It Up and Put it Away Till Daddy Comes Home from the Army, Soothe Me, Green Gin, Dream a While,* and *Don't Let the Sun Catch You Crying.*

"Then I took off out of Jeff and went on the road. Started my first job in Oakland, California, in a place on Seventh Street called The Villa. I went from there to the Backstage in San Francisco, Say When, California Theater Restaurant on Post Street. Then I ended up at the Blackhawk. Andre Previn, Dave Brubeck, Miles Davis, Chet Baker, we all ended up over there. Then I played Jack's Tavern on Sutter Street. I traveled up and down the road.

"I made my debut in New York in 1954 with Jimmy Jones on piano, Earl May on bass, and Percy Bryce on drums, at Birdland. Opposite Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker! I was scared to death! Charlie Parker used to come up to me every night and sing 'When you open it to speak,' because he wanted me to do *My Funny Valentine.*"

He said, "You've never seen the TV show I did?"

"Nope," I said. I knew it turned up from time to time on public television, but for some reason I'd missed it, despite hearing it acclaimed by anyone who saw it. It was produced by a woman named Lois Shelton.

"Let me show it to you." Ernie turned on the VCR.

"When I was 17," Ernie says, voice over a sequence of him in a nightclub, singing *Round Midnight*, "I had three or four hit records. I made that great mistake. I thought it would never end . . .

Curtis Pegler is playing an alto obligato.

"The bottom fell out, for some reason. It's been a scuffle ever since. The cars and the clothes and the moneys -- like it would never run out . . .

"The record shows: I stood the blows."

A black and white photo sequence. A total-immersion baptism in a river or maybe bayou in Louisiana. A white frame church. "I would sing in church . . . The flo' would rock when the church gets t' goin' . . . " He has slipped back into a deep southern sound. "Somebody would have a half pint of whisky in their hip pocket, and they was singin' church songs, and swingin' out the door!"

He says that he moved with his mother to Los Angles when he was fifteen. Black and white shots of Los Angeles streets in that long-ago time, mid-1940s, the famous big old Red Cars, the interurban trolleys that were bought up by automotive, tire, and highway interests, and deliberately dismantled to force people into automobiles, leaving the working poor without transportation, no way to get to jobs, and now you see them, weary men and women, waiting interminably on the abominable bus system to get home from underpaid jobs all acro L.A.'s vast summer-dusty smog-brown palm-scattered sprawl.

Shots of movie posters. *Stormy Weather* with Lena Horne and Bill Robinson. Benny Carter wrote her charts. Such was the segregation that he was allowed to write only for black performers. He told me that himself. Astounding. A movie called *Sepia Cinderella.* Another called *Jiving in Bebop,* starring one Dizzy Gillespie. Herb Jeffries talking on-camera, about the four black westerns he made, including one called *The Bronze Buccaroo.* Stupefying. The real west was full of black cowboys. The movies weren't. Jeffries talking about how he always stayed at the Dunbar. He wasn't allowed into the hotels along Sunset and Wilshire.

A headline on the California Eagle, a black newspaper.

Protest Police Brutality

So what else is new in 1992?

You couldn't live north of Wilshire Boulevard if you were black in the 1940s. Ernie says, "King Cole, Lena Horne, they had a lot of problems."

Court Reviews Right
Of Negroes to Live

In Their Own Homes

A story saying the California Supreme Court was reviewing lower court cases on whether blacks could occupy homes in Los Angeles that they actually owned. Surrealistic.

Police Beat Family
Of Shooting Suspect

The kind of story that came across my desk constantly when I was a desk man at the *Chicago Defender*, the kind of story that never gets into the white press.

"There was a fantasy," Ernie says, "in the black world that there was going to be a way out in the movies, that they were going to be the first blacks to really break through . . . "

Shots of Frank Sinatra, Ava Gardner, and others, in the nightclubs of the black community, "hanging out in Central Avenue with all of us . . .

"You see, blacks were trying to get into Hollywood, and the whites were trying to get into Central Avenue."

A black-and-white shot of Central Avenue at night, all aglow, the street crowded with cars. Ernie's then-young voice singing *Soothe Me*. He was a little Eckstinish in those days. He even looked a little like Eckstine.

A contemporary color shot of the facade of a school, a gray stuccoed structure in what we might call 1930s Hollywood *moderne*, the name Thomas Jefferson High School spelled on its face in dated sans-serif letters. Ernie talks about the kids who went there, Chico Hamilton, Hampton Hawes, the Farmer brothers (Art and Addison), the Royal brothers (Marshall and Ernie), Dexter Gordon, Eric Dolphy. He forget Edmund Thigpen, Frank Morgan, Big Jay McNeely, and choreographer Alvin Ailey.

A club owner says two-thirds of the patronage of some of those Central Avenue nightclubs was white. A black-and-white of Ernie singing at the Club Alabam with Andy Kirk's band.

Then some shots of latter-day Ernie, guiding us along Central Avenue. Empty lots where those great clubs used to be.

Sweets Edison talks on camera, tells how the cops hassled the club owners.

White Policemen Jail Man
Walking with White Friend

Yeah, I believe that. Long after that, in the 1970s, when the dreadful Daryl Gates had assumed command of the LAPD, it was going on. My son Phil, then nineteen, was close friends with London McDaniel, son of the singer and songwriter Gene McDaniel. They'd been classmates at the Berklee College of Music. Whenever they would go somewhere in Los Angles, cops would stop the car. A white kid and a black kid together. Proactive policing. It didn't happen sometimes. It happened every time. Flashlights up the nose. Hand frisking. Batons exploring the crotch. Draw your own conclusion. I began to worry about them hanging out together. I didn't want them killed. LAPD cops don't require much excuse.

I can use his name now, because he's dead.

He was when I knew him chief paramedic for the San Fernando Valley and, if I recall, West Los Angeles, a man so expert in his work that he sometimes lectured on cardiopulmonary resuscitation in university medical schools.

His name was Arlen Nine, nicknamed Shorty, because he was -- short, stocky, sturdy. Shorty Nine was one of the toughest men I ever knew. Like all truly tough men, men secure in their manhood, Shorty had no need to give demonstrations of machismo. He was no coward like Stacey Koon. Genuinely tough men are often quite kind, and Shorty was of that ilk. He was from Cleveland. He had served as a paratrooper in Korea, he was a weapons expert, he was rather uneducated, he was a Republican, and he was one of my best friends.

Shorty, by the way, was the paramedic who attended Robert Kennedy when he was assassinated. All reports on that shooting said Kennedy was shot with a .22. Shorty wrote on his report, a copy of which he showed me once, that Kennedy was shot with a .38 from close range. He absolutely did not believe the conventional explanation of a lunatic Sirhan Sirhan shooting him. And Shorty had seen innumerable gunshot wounds, both in Korea and as a paramedic. In all of the researches by writers into the Robert Kennedy killing, no one ever interviewed Shorty Nine.

Shorty hated the L.A. cops. And so did many of the paramedics under his command.

"I live in fear," he said to me on more than one occasion, "that one day one of my guys is going to kill a cop because of what they see when they get to these police shootings."

Shorty told me of a case involving a black boy of thirteen or fourteen who lived in a good neighborhood of the San Fernando Valley. The boy had been attempting to slip his own father's car out of the driveway to go for a joy ride. Two cops on a stakeout of a nearby house saw him do it. When he realized they had seen him, the boy panicked and tried to climb a fence. A cop put a bullet in his brain.

When Shorty's boys arrived, they found the kid face down on the ground, his hands cuffed behind his back.

"Get those fucking things off him," one of them said.

"That's procedure," the cop said.

"I don't care," the paramedic said. "He's not going anywhere with a hole in his head like that. Get 'em off."

Shorty arrived on the scene. Ever afterward he was haunted by what he saw. The boy lying there in his nice clean bluejeans and tee-shirt, weighing all of 90 pounds, blood pouring from his head. He died. The cop was cleared. Surprised? Stacey Koon was cleared. A Ventura County jury was persuaded that they should not believe their own eyes.

After the riots, you saw LAPD officers whimpering on television about their safety (more L.A. cops were killed in the 1920s than the 1980s), moaning that they were not appreciated, some of them saying they were going to quit. "I'm outta here," one of them said.

Good. Goooooood. Write if you get work.

Buddy Collette sits at a piano, his tenor across his lap. He says the police didn't like white women coming to Central Avenue "and mingling in the clubs."

Sweets Edison comes on camera. "The police department mostly closed up Central Avenue . . . (They) would mostly hire their policemen from down south. They were pretty rough, most of them. They were pretty prejudiced. They burned up a lot of the places all along Central Avenue. Central Avenue became just another street."

A black-and-white shot of a burning nightclub.

The newspapers, whose owners, editors, and reporters were through most of this century so cozy with corrupt cops, politicians, and judges that they simply did not report crime in the city. "Law is where you buy it in this town," Raymond Chandler wrote in *Farewell, My Lovely*, and "this city" was the sleazy world of his fictional private eye Philip Marlowe. In 1938, a captain who headed the LAPD's Special Intelligence Section blew up the automobile of a reform investigator who was making the police brass and the politicians nervous. Do you think that he or his colleagues would have any compunction about burning down black nightclubs? And that the white press would cover it? Stephen Reinhardt, former president of the Los Angeles Police Commission and now a judge on the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, recently said, "Historically, the press has not done an adequate job of investigating law enforcement in this city. Generally, the press here has been a patsy -- a press agent -- for the police."

Why were the clubs burned? Only because of "mingling"? Or were there more practical business reasons? "For most of the first half of this century," the Los Angeles *Times* reported recently, "Los Angeles was a corrupt, vice-ridden town. A member of the 1937 grand jury said there were 1,800 bookmakers, 600 whorehouses and 200 gambling dens in the city and -- as in other cities -- the criminal elements who ran these illicit enterprises regularly paid off police and politicians to keep their enterprises open."

And maybe to burn out competitors along Central Avenue?

Thoughts like these pass through my mind as I watch those sequences in the film.

Then Ernie's wife Delores, a beautiful woman, is on camera, telling how she met Ernie when she was a cashier in a nightclub, going to school to study nursing. She talks about an aunt who was very wise, telling her she mustn't go sneaking around spying on Ernie, reminding her that she knew he was an entertainer when she married him. She says that Ernie has been ripped off by a lot of the business people.

"These people will *hurt* you," Ernie says, possibly establishing the show-business understatement of the decade.

Buddy Collette: "It got very quiet for (Ernie) for a long time. He had to be amazing to handle it as well as he did." Collette remembers Charlie Parker getting one gig a week for $25. Bird came over to Buddy's house for dinner at a time when Buddy was doing studio work, playing the Groucho Marx show a half hour a week for good money. Bird said he wished he could be like him. Buddy was shaken by it.

Rock and roll and rhythm-and-blues came in. "I really did try to change," Ernie says. "Just to give it a shot. It just didn't feel right with me."

Shot in a dressing room of Ernie, Sweets, others. Sweets says, "The one thing you can give me, we have: friendship."

"Well," Ernie says, "that's all you're gonna get." And they laugh.

"Well that's all I require."

Then they start doing the dozens on each other, trading insults.

One of the happy periods of Ernie's life was the ten years, starting in 1959, that he spent with the Harry James band. Ernie had in past spoken warmly of James, yet there was little about him in the film. So I asked him about the experience.

"Working with Harry James was wonderful," he said. "It was a great experience, an honest experience. I didn't make a lot of money, but I sure got a lot of experience. I got the feeling he loved me like a son. We worked around the country. We had good times. And a few tough times in some places."

He was talking about the problems of being a black performer with a white band. Artie Shaw has described how Roy Eldridge, when he traveled with his band with star billing, would sometimes check into a hotel by announcing himself as Mr. Eldridge's valet, thereby getting the room key. J.J. Johnson told me that the main reason he and Kai Winding broke up their very successful group was the unceasing hassle of trying to get hotel accommodations together.

Ernie said, "I'd look around and Harry would look at me and say, 'What is the problem?' I said, 'I don't know. They called my name for my key.' They had the keys ready four months ago. You never go on the road without a confirmation from the hotels. When the bus pulled up, they'd start passing the rooms out. So when they called my name, they told me to wait. Harry said, 'What's the problem?' I said, 'I don't know, they called my name but I haven't got a key.'

"So Harry got up and said, 'Mr. Monty . . . ' Pee Wee Monty, his road manager. Harry said, 'Do we have a manifest?' Harry looked at it and saw my name on it and he said to the room clerk, 'Now what is the problem?'

"He said something like, 'Well we don't have a room for him here but we could put him two blocks down the street and he'd be close to the band.' So Harry would say, 'Pee Wee, go down the street and see if they can accommodate 28 of us. Take the stuff out of this lobby, put it back in the bus, and let's go.' And they would say, 'Well wait a minute,' and Harry would say, 'What are we waiting for?' And the clerk would say, 'Well we might find something here," and Harry would say, 'Well find a corner room.' And they'd say, 'Why a corner room?' And he'd say, 'Because that's the biggest room. It gets plenty of air from both sides, and right now he needs it.'"

Ernie laughed. "I never opened my mouth. It didn't happen often. But it happened.

"We'd be in the south somewhere. A guy would ask me to sing *The Yellow Rose of Texas* or something. I'd tell him I don't know it and he'd tell me to sing it anyway. When it was time for me to sing, he'd say, 'I thought I told you to sing *Yellow Rose of Texas*.' Naturally he'd call me 'boy.'

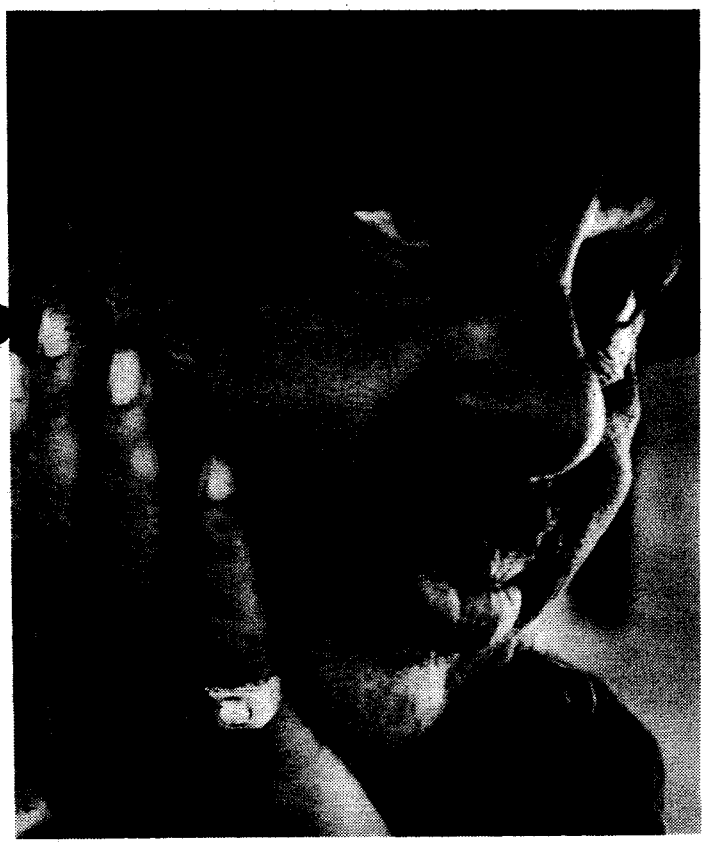
Harry would stop the band and say, 'Just a minute. I don't

know how big boys come where you come from, but this is a grown man here. We don't have *Yellow Rose of Texas* and if we *had* it, we wouldn't play it. And furthermore, we're going to pack this band up if they don't put you out of here *because we're leaving now*.' And the guy would get tossed out.

"Harry was born in Georgia and raised in Beaumont, Texas. He was a truly wonderful fellow. He used to tell me sometimes, 'I know how you are, and I know you're strong, and you're a wonderful person. Sometimes it ain't gonna work. We're gonna have a problem.' He would let me know where we would have our biggest problems. I realized I wasn't the only one with problems. He wanted something one way, and they'd say, 'Do you wanna go home or do you wanna play?'

"We did a television show in New York. They didn't want a singer. Harry fought, fought, fought for me to be on that show. They got really hacked at him. I just looked at him and said, 'Hey, do the show and let's get outta here.' Then they made up their mind they'd let me on. By the time the show was aired, you didn't see me at all. They'd cut me out.

"Same thing in Philadelphia. They said to Harry, 'Where'd you find him? Wonderful singer.' He said, 'He's from right here, Philadelphia.' We were doing *That's Life*. You wouldn't see the show for a couple of weeks then. When it came out, we were in Las Vegas. Wasn't on it. There was cooking in the spot where I was."



Ernie Andrews **photo by John Reeves**

The movie nears its end. Ernie is saying, "Jazz is a wonderful thing. You have to *apply* to play jazz . . .

"It isn't over yet. I don't ever want to stop or slow down. I don't ever want to get that tired. That's the only thing that keeps me going. Because if (I) stop to think about the things that happened with me, the ache and the pain that I have, if I gave in to that, I'd be in big trouble . . .

"I know that the lights are coming up, I know that the mikes are going to be on, and I'm going to forget about the aches and pains for a minute."

Then the movie's over, but Ernie isn't. A new generation, a much younger generation, seems to be discovering him. Among his admirers are the Harper Brothers, Winard and Philip, whose most recent album, *You Can Hide Inside the Music* -- marvelous title! -- features the work of some of the heroes of these two brilliant young players: Sweets Edison, Jimmy McGriff, Jimmy Heath, and Ernie Andrews. And Ernie has been touring with the group led by the Harpers.

"They came and got us," Ernie says. "They invited us to perform on the album. We were delighted that the young men wanted to keep us all going. It was kind of a thrill.

"I'm now getting ready to go to Chicago and Indianapolis with the Harper Brothers.

"I feel like Duke Ellington did. I think no one can critique me, because they don't know anything about me. They say what they think they know about me, or what they think that I may feel, but basically they can't critique me. 'Cause one day I'm one way and another day I'm another way. It depends where my feelings are for the day. My metabolism goes this way, that way. One day I'm singing something up, and the next I'm singing it down. It's knowing how to do it either way. That's art. A lot of people want to hear you do it the same way all the time." The words are strong; but there are suppressed sobs in the voice.

"You're making a record. You've got all these people watching the clock. 'Cause it's money. The engineer might say, 'Would you stand closer in to the mike.' No. You've got the dials in your hand. Pick it up. Let me perform, let me do it the way I feel it. They don't like you to do that. It's the managers, the agents. They don't like you to like yourself. They don't like you to have confidence in yourself, and it takes every bit of that. They want you to run scared all the time because of what they think or how they want you to be. And if you don't comply, then something happens.

"They want to make you what they want to make you -- *if* they want to make you. In the meantime you're dying inside, because you're not doing what you want to. I know no one's going to get in this box for me when the time comes. I'm just going to enjoy myself doing what I like to do the way I like to do. I like to sing songs. Predominantly I live. It makes it honest, because I'm telling the truth when I'm singing, and it comes off much better than to just sing a pretty song because someone had a hit record on it and I've got to follow them. Sometimes it isn't fruitful for you to do that, because certain songs fit certain people. Johnny Mathis sings songs that I could sing, but they fit his style so great. Billy Eckstine used

to sing songs, and hey! you couldn't get past it. Dan Grissom. Billy Daniels. King Pleasure. All special people. A lot of wonderful people who did things that fit them. I take funny songs. I took *Tie a Yellow Ribbon*. I haven't recorded it yet, but I took it and swung it to death. I've had jazz people say, 'You know, I never did care about that song until I heard you do it.' It swung right on out the window.

"So the ups and downs of life can be tough. If you let it. If you really realize what it is, or how it is, and you're by yourself, you can't fight city hall. If you like living, you can continue on going. If you balk upon it, something happens to you. I don't mean like getting killed or anything like that. I'm talking about one'll tell two, and two'll tell ten, and ten'll twenty people. And then you find obstacles in your way of trying to be who you really are.

"I don't have what I want, but I've got what I need.

"And that's common sense to deal with life, because I love life. It can have a little hassle every now and then, but I love it. Since I'm here, I just wanna be around and not worry myself to death or run into obstacles too tough. I'm like all my brothers and sisters, but I know that I have to do the best that I can with life. And I speak for my people all over the place."

Delores came home from work. She looked a little older than she was when the film was made, but still a pretty woman with a warm smile. She and Ernie have been married 44 years. She is a private nurse who with as many as eight patients a day. Ernie's son Mark Sr., a handsome man of thirty-five, came in, greeting me warmly. We had talked on the phone. One of these conversations took place immediately after the riot, when I called to find out if the Andrews family were all right. They were. But it was close, Mark said.

"And if those four," he said, referring to Stacey Koon and friends, "are tried on a federal charge of interfering with his (Rodney King's) civil rights and are acquitted, it will happen again. And I don't want to *be* here. I'm heading for the Andes or some place." He gave a dark chuckle.

I took my leave, waved from the car window at Ernie, and drove away. The streets in this neighborhood are paved with cement, white after decades of sun and patterned with meandering radiating cracks filled with tar. They are from the Raymond Chandler era, and so are the one-story houses.

It was late afternoon and sunny. I drove the business streets in the vicinity of Venice and LaBrea. Lebanon West. Tangles of blackened metal. Stores burned out. Boarded up with plywood. Even those whose walls were still standing, Ernie had said, were gutted. An auto supply store right at LaBrea, bearing a sign saying, "We will soon be back to serve you."

I was thinking about Shorty Nine and Eulah Love as I looked at this devastation. In early May the Los Angeles Times ran a soul-searching five-part series of articles on the cozy past relationship of press to police. It was critical of its own past behavior as well as that of other papers. One of the stories in this *mea culpa* orgy began:

"Before Rodney G. King, there was Eulah Love.

"Love was a 39-year-old black woman who was shot to death by two Los Angeles police officers early in 1979 as she was about to throw a kitchen knife at them."

Now hold it right there! That's bad journalism in the second sentence. The reporter does not know that she was about to throw a kitchen knife at them, only that the cops *said* she was.

The incident occurred January 3, 1979. A man from the gas company had come earlier in the day to cut off her service. He told police that she had assaulted him with a shovel.

The two cops arrived. They claimed later that they drilled her when she was about to throw this 11-inch kitchen knife at them. First, have you ever attempted to throw a knife so that it lands point first? It's all very nifty in the movies, but try it some time. It's a developed skill. Second, will anybody stand there and tell me that you can't jump out of the way when you are braced and ready to do so? If I can duck a snowball, I can duck a knife. And two strong male cops couldn't take a knife away from a lone woman? Or even talk her into puttin[illegible] it down? I forget how many times they shot her, but it was a lot. They ventilated Eulah Love very thoroughly.

I was fascinated by the later statement of Daryl Gates who said, in that quaint jargon, that the shooting was "in policy." He did add, "Any way you viewed it, it was a bad shooting."

So. There were good shootings and bad shootings.

In 1964, the year before the Watts riot, only five of 42 L.A. cops accused of brutality were disciplined. A masked police officer told television reporter Wayne Satz in 1977 that "most officers are extremely eager to be in a shooting." As for racism, he said that "a majority are definitely prejudiced."

The police department was predictably outraged and sued the station, KABC. The case was thrown out of court. But this is a measure of L.A. copy mentality: they put photos of Wayne Satz on the figures of bad guys on their shooting ranges and pumped them full of holes. The worst that can be said is that each of man who did this was a would-be killer. The best you could say is that they were infantile fantasists with no sense whatever of being accountable to the civilian community. This contempt for the public is manifest in [illegible] remark common on the LAPD: "If you want to be liked, jo[illegible] the Fire Department."

Shorty Nine told me, within weeks, possibly days, a detail of the Eulah Love killing:that one of his paramedics arrived in time to hear a cop say over her corpse, "Well, there's another nigger who won't threaten any more police officers."

It was a few days after I drove through the devastation that a blond youngish man with a face nobody lives in, the vice president of the United States, a supercilious vapid pampered rich boy who has never known a day's hardship and whose greatest act of courage was draft-dodging, one Dan Q. Ken Doll of Indianapolis, who doubtless has never heard of J.J. Johnson or Wes Montgomery or Freddie Hubbard who also were born there but of course have never been members of his country club, explained it all to us:

"We have a poverty of values gripping our inner cities."

Next Issue: The Fire This Time Part II
The Return of Red Mitchell