

from The Concrete River, by Luis Rodriguez, 1991

Watts Bleeds

Watts bleeds
leaving stained reminders
on dusty sidewalks.

Here where I strut alone
as glass lies broken by my feet
and a blanket of darkness is slung
across the wooden shacks
of *nuestra colonia*.

Watts bleeds
dripping from carcasses of dreams:
Where despair
is old people
sitting on torn patio sofas
with empty eyes
and children running down alleys
with big sticks.

Watts bleeds
on vacant lots
and burned out buildings—
temples desolated by a people's rage.

Where fear is a deep river.
Where hate is an overgrown weed.

Watts bleeds
even as we laugh,

recall good times,
drink and welcome daylight
through the broken windshield
of an old Impala.

Here is Watts of my youth,
where teachers threw me
from classroom to classroom,
not knowing where I could fit in.

Where I learned to fight or run,
where I zigzagged down alleys,
jumped over fences,
and raced by graffiti on crumbling
factory walls.

Where we played
between the boxcars,
bleeding from
broken limbs and torn flesh,
and where years later
we shot up *carga*
in the playground
of our childhood.

Watts bleeds
as the shadows of the damned
engulfs all the *chinga* of our lives.

In the warmth of a summer night,
gunshots echo their deadly song

through the silence of fear;
prelude to a heartbeat.

Watts bleeds
as I bled
getting laid-off from work,
standing by my baby's crib,
touching his soft cheek
and fingering his small hand
as dreams shatter again,
dreams of fathers
for little men.

Watts bleeds
and the city hemorrhages,
unable to stop the flow
from this swollen and festering sore.

Oh bloom, you trampled flower!
Come alive as once
you tried to do from the ashes.

Watts, bleeding and angry,
you will be free.

Mean Streets (To Piri Thomas)

Your mean streets
visited my mean streets
one hollow summer day
in the 60s
and together we played ball,
crackling sounds on the asphalt
echoing from Los to Harlem.

And everytime I shot dope into a vein,
you felt the euphoria in your prose
and I saw me in you
and I heard you yell
and it was my voice
tearing open the night sky.

Oh, so many times, I crumpled the pages
of your life to my face,
and cried:
Savior, Savior, hold my hand!

And your seven long times
Was a long night for me,
but I knew you, *compadre*,
you, steady, companion down the alleyways,
barrío brother,
father/partner...teacher.

I heard your screams
and entered through the gateway
of your nightmare
into the gateway of my dreams.