

Leimert Park Synopses

One/Two Liner

Leimert Park documents an extraordinary group of artists and musicians who, in the wake of the 1992 Los Angeles riots, create an underground arts movement and transform a community. Filmed over a period of 7 years, the film features extensive performance footage interwoven with interviews and old home movies from the area.

Short (100-250 words)

In April 1992, Richard Fulton, a formerly homeless man who had been living on Los Angeles' skid row, opened Fifth Street Dick's coffeehouse in the South Central Los Angeles neighborhood of Leimert Park. A few days later the 1992 Los Angeles riots broke out. For five days and five nights, a group of dedicated merchants and artists stood guard to protect their village from the fires that raged through the streets of South Central Los Angeles.

Richard's coffeehouse soon became a gathering spot for the community, and ultimately sparked a remarkable underground renaissance of African-American art and culture. Leimert Park became a stopover for world-class jazz musicians who might drop in to jam until 3 or 4 in the morning. The sidewalks overflowed with people of all ages and races absorbing the jazz, hip-hop, blues and spoken-word poetry performed in the park and various music venues.

Told through the powerful words, art and music of the community, this film articulates and celebrates the profound struggles and deep spirit of the extraordinary artists and musicians who transformed a few blocks of modest storefronts into a vibrant and inspiring cultural oasis. Intimate and compelling, "Leimert Park" is also a universal tale of the struggles and triumphs of artists everywhere and of the power and importance of art and music in our lives.

Long (500-1000)

"Music has the tendency to make a community have rhythm. Once you get rhythm you can get harmony and that's the heartbeat of the community. So you take jazz music and you play it long enough and loud enough in an environment – what happens is that people come together because the music is the thing that makes everything gel – it's alive..." Richard Fulton

In April 1992, Richard Fulton, a formerly homeless man who had been living on Los Angeles' skid row, opened Fifth Street Dick's coffeehouse in the South Central Los Angeles neighborhood of Leimert Park. It was only two days later that the already-

Leimert Park: The Story of a Village in South Central L. A.
A documentary film

simmering community exploded when the police officers involved in the Rodney King beating trial were found innocent of all charges.

For five days and five nights, the merchants and artists of Leimert Park stood guard to protect their village from the fires that raged through the streets of South Central Los Angeles. When the smoke cleared, Leimert Park, and in particular Fifth Street Dick's, became a gathering spot for a community needing to heal. With his open attitude and trademark high-volume jazz music, Richard and his coffeehouse ultimately sparked a remarkable underground renaissance of African-American art and culture. Leimert Park became a stopover for world-class jazz musicians and jazz groups who would play or just drop in after their paying gigs around town, to jam until 3 or 4 in the morning. Soon the sidewalks overflowed with people of all ages and races absorbing the sounds of African drums and dancing, jazz, hip hop, blues and spoken word poetry -- performed in the park and the small storefronts that line the area. Word of this underground "Little Harlem" spread as far as Europe and Japan.

This film celebrates the cultural renaissance that emerged from the ashes of '92 -- the roots of this cultural movement and the courageous struggle of artists in the Leimert Park area. Beginning with the turbulent 60s and the 1965 Watts upheaval that inspired the first black-owned art gallery, the film moves through 2004 as the area and its artists are threatened with redevelopment and spiraling rents.

In the late 60s and 70s, the artists of Leimert Park quietly flourished, despite the continuing struggles, focusing on their people and the rhythms around them for their inspiration. But the 80s were a time of immense change in the area. Many of the gains were lost in a slow erosion to arts, education and social services caused by the funding cuts of the Reagan and Bush administrations. Not surprisingly, the 80s were also a time of marked increase in drug and gang activity. The community suffered and the artists struggled to make a difference and survive. Ironically, it was the tragic events of the 1992 uprising that became the catalyst for positive change in the community, as people found a need to express again.

Featuring performances by world-famous jazz pianist Horace Tapscott, drummer Billy Higgins, the Pan Afrikan People's Arkestra, and spoken-word poet Kamau Daaood, along with other musicians and artists, this film celebrates the value of the creative spirit and the profound importance of the community artist. Along with the joy and celebratory spirit of these artists and musicians is a deep and serious commitment to their art and their community.

The story is told through the words, music and performances of people in the community. Interspersing home movie footage from the area in the 60s, the film paints a raw yet intimate and inspiring portrait of a community. With no budget and a small crew of volunteers, the documentary was filmed over a seven-year period from 1998-2004.
