

# **Stony Brook University**



OFFICIAL COPY

**The official electronic file of this thesis or dissertation is maintained by the University Libraries on behalf of The Graduate School at Stony Brook University.**

**© All Rights Reserved by Author.**

**Conflicts, Riots, and Korean Americans in Los Angeles, 1965-1992**

A Dissertation Presented

by

**Chanhaeng Lee**

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

in

**History**

Stony Brook University

**December 2012**

Copyright by  
Chanhaeng Lee  
2012

**Stony Brook University**

The Graduate School

**Chanhaeng Lee**

We, the dissertation committee for the above candidate for the  
Doctor of Philosophy degree, hereby recommend  
acceptance of this dissertation.

**Dr. Shirley J. Lim - Dissertation Advisor**  
**Associate Professor, Department of History**

**Dr. Nancy Tomes - Chairperson of Defense**  
**Professor, Department of History**

**Dr. Iona Man-Cheong**  
**Associate Professor, Department of History**

**Dr. Nerissa S. Balce**  
**Assistant Professor, Department of Asian and Asian American Studies**  
**Stony Brook University**

This dissertation is accepted by the Graduate School

Charles Taber  
Interim Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of the Dissertation

**Conflicts, Riots, and Korean Americans in Los Angeles, 1965-1992**

by

**Chanhaeng Lee**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

in

**History**

Stony Brook University

**2012**

Facing numerous disadvantages in the U.S. labor market, Koreans immigrating in the wake of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act found few options but to run small businesses. Lower start-up costs brought them to low-income, inner-city communities, which were increasingly Black and Brown as state investment dwindled and Whites fled to the suburbs. Structural economic and historical social conditions gave rise to conflicts, especially with Black customers. In Los Angeles, Black-Korean tensions reached a peak in late April 1992, when more than two thousand Korean-owned stores were burned and/or looted. This project explores the ways in which Korean immigrants navigated the discursive terrain of race relations, shaping the narrative of their individual and collective experiences. The study begins with an account of the social and structural context in which interethnic conflicts took place. It then examines how Korean immigrants actively identified with, negotiated, and challenged subject positions assigned to them in a discursive field in which they had very limited voice. Koreans challenged their representation as disrespectful ghetto merchants by deploying frames of cultural difference

and media sensationalism, seeking to neutralize Black activists' charges by selectively appropriating the image of the model minority. When Black-Korean conflicts were cited as the cause of the 1992 Los Angeles riots, they actively developed a counternarrative to reframe the riots as an eruption in ongoing Black-White relations. Based on a narrow conceptualization of the political to which inner-city Korean immigrant merchants had virtually no access, popular and scholarly criticism characterizes them as apolitical in American race relations. I contend that a more expansive approach to the field that incorporates discursive practices at the margins reveals they were active agents who selectively combined multiple narratives to defend their interests and rights.

## Table of Contents

Tables & Figures	vii
Introduction	1
Chapter One: Encounters between Koreans and Blacks in Los Angeles	19
Immigration of urban middle class Koreans	21
Small business as a lifeboat	26
Internal resources for small business	31
External resources for small business	35
Korean “commercial supremacy” in South Central Los Angeles	38
Urban restructuring in Los Angeles	44
Middleman minority as “oppressed-oppressor”	51
Exemplary city for racial harmony?	62
Chapter Two: The Language of Black-Korean Conflict	68
Smoldering	70
James H. Cleaver and the articulation of Asian “crisis”	72
Withering of progressive political imagination	79
Black discontent with Korean merchants	82
Korean American responses	90
Model minority discourse	96
Apolitical Korean immigrants?	100
Languages of alliances between Blacks and Koreans	105
Chapter Three: Exacerbation of Conflict	113
Boycotts	115
Danny Bakewell and the community policing of merchants	122
Local government responses	125
The shooting death of Latasha Harlins	128
Deracialization of the shooting	132
Rarticulating the master’s language	139
The John’s Liquor Store boycott	148
Korean American political “muscle”	152
K.A.R.E. and generational difference	159
Chapter Four: From Conflict to Crisis	164
Red flags	166
Eruption of the riots	175
Gun-toting vigilantes	182
Melodramatic imagination of the riots	186
<i>P’oktong</i> melodrama urging alliance	197

Lacunae in the Korean American melodramatic languages	200
The making of rebellious Korean Oedipuses	207
Epilogue	214
Bibliography	220



## Tables & Figures

### Tables

Table 1: Self-Employment Rates of Selected Groups (Ages 25-64, Employed) in Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside, and Ventura Counties	29
Table 2: Reported Attacks and Robberies from Blacks, Los Angeles City and the Surrounding Neighborhoods, March-May, 1991	143

### Figures

Figure 1: Koreatown, Downtown, and South Central Los Angeles	18
Figure 2: Mike Alewitz's "Labor Solidarity Has No Borders" (1990)	60
Figure 3: Boycott Flyer of the Organization of Mutual Neighborhood Interest	119
Figure 4: Untitled Cartoon by Dong Ho Moon, No. 1	195
Figure 5: Untitled Cartoon by Dong Ho Moon, No. 2	196
Figure 6: A Graffiti Screenshot Captured from Dai Sil Kim-Gipson's 2004 Documentary Film <i>Wet Sand: Voices from L.A. Ten Years Later</i>	203

## **Introduction**

In the decades since Koreans began to immigrate to the United States in large numbers in the late 1960s, Black-Korean tensions in inner-city Black neighborhoods have become a familiar symbol of American interethnic conflict. Largely invisible within the binary schema of American racial politics, Korean immigrants were increasingly brought to the forefront of urban race relations when conflicts with Black customers arose in their inner-city stores. The Los Angeles riots in April 1992, which had a devastating impact on many Korean immigrants, clearly showed that American race relations went beyond the Black-White paradigm. Korean immigrant shopkeepers were often charged with disrespectful treatment of Black customers, unwillingness to hire Black residents, draining economic resources from Black communities, racial prejudice, and price gouging. When a wave of looting and arson engulfed Los Angeles in 1992, Koreans were even accused of being primary instigators of the riots.

This dissertation, “Conflicts, Riots, and Korean Americans in Los Angeles, 1965-1992,” examines how Koreans in Los Angeles, home to the largest Korean population in the United States, navigated the terrain of race relations to shape their views of interethnic conflict as well as their strategies for defending themselves against the accusations. In analyzing the experience of Korean immigrants in Los Angeles from the time they arrived in significant numbers to the eruption of the Los Angeles riots of 1992, it becomes clear that Korean immigrants played active roles in framing conflict issues and defending their interests and rights. This study of the Korean immigrants’ experience shows that despite their limited knowledge of U.S. mainstream culture and language, Korean immigrants were active agents who learned how to negotiate their positions within race relations as a way to get more favorable terms and protect their own American Dream.

My research builds on previous studies that have examined the causes of conflicts between Blacks and Koreans in Los Angeles. Considerable attention has been paid to race relations between Blacks and Koreans. The interethnic conflicts were a brand new chapter of the binary racial schema and at the same time they were, especially for Korean American journalists and scholars, the most pressing issue confronting the recently formed immigrant community. While Korean American sociologist Jennifer Lee argued that everyday interactions between Blacks and Koreans in inner-cities were “not antagonistic, but rather positive, civil, and routine,” most other writers brought into focus what they viewed as the causes that led to Black-Korean conflicts.<sup>1</sup>

Sociopsychological factors were frequently cited. For example, Ella Stewart tried to explain the conflicts in terms of different cultural rules held by the two groups governing what constituted appropriate versus inappropriate behaviors. Interethnic conflicts were understood to occur when these rules were violated. One well-known example of such cultural differences was that Korean female merchants tended to put change on the counter instead of into a male customer’s hand. Korean cultural custom discourages any physical contact between a woman and a man other than her husband or immediate family members. However, such behavior was often experienced by Blacks as inappropriate and disrespectful.<sup>2</sup> The Black-Korean conflicts were sometimes approached as if they were caused by communication barriers between Blacks and

---

<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Lee, *Civility in the City: Blacks, Jews, and Koreans in Urban America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 6.

<sup>2</sup> Ella Stewart, “Communication between African Americans and Korean Americans: Before and after the Los Angeles Riots,” in Edward T. Chang and Russell C. Leong, eds., *Los Angeles: Struggles toward Multiethnic Community* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 32-38. For the cultural understanding of the Black-Korean conflicts, see also Edward T. Chang, “New Urban Crisis: Korean-African American Relations,” in Kwang Chung Kim, ed., *Koreans in the Hood: Conflict with African Americans* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 49-50; *Los Angeles Times*, April 15, 1985, July 20, 1987, and November 8, 1989; Lynell George, *No Crystal Stair: African-Americans in the City of Los Angeles* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994), 83.

limited-English-proficient Korean immigrants.<sup>3</sup> A few scholars focused primarily on explaining how mutual prejudices caused the conflicts, pointing out that Korean immigrants viewed Blacks as lazy, irrational, law-breaking, and lacking a strong work ethic, while Blacks perceived Korean immigrants as cunning, cheating, exploiting, and money-chasing foreigners.<sup>4</sup>

The interethnic conflicts have also been examined as a product of structural and economic factors. For instance, Regina Freer placed the conflicts within the context of the political economy of Los Angeles, emphasizing the roles of economic elites and government officials in allocating economic resources in such a way as to exacerbate poor economic conditions in the inner-city. Her research helped us look at the forest, not just the trees, by pointing out that the Black-Korean conflicts were a competition between two resource-deficient minorities “over a single slice of an entire pie,” a process that made those responsible for the allocation of resources seem irrelevant to the conflicts.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Sanford J. Ungar, *Fresh Blood: The New American Immigrants* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 282; *Los Angeles Times*, April 15, 1985 and January 11, 1990. For analyses of divergent communication patterns between Black customers and Korean merchants, see Ella Stewart, op. cit., 45 and Benjamin Bailey, “Communicative Behavior and Conflict between African-American Customers and Korean Immigrant Retailers in Los Angeles,” *Discourse & Society*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2000), 86-108. According to Bailey, unlike Blacks who preferred a pattern of sociable communication, Korean merchants tended to follow a relatively taciturn and restrained pattern due to their cultural or linguistic differences. However, such a pattern displayed by Korean merchants was often attributed by Black customers to Korean racism against Blacks.

<sup>4</sup> Hyunsuk Yoo, “Korean Americans and African Americans in the Los Angeles Riots: A Study of the Rhetoric of Conflict,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1996, 101-102. For the mutual prejudices, see also Edward T. Chang, “New Urban Crisis: Korean-Black Conflicts in Los Angeles,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1990, 182-202. For Korean immigrants’ racial prejudice against Blacks, see Moon H. Jo, “Korean Merchants in the Black Community: Prejudice among the Victims of Prejudice,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (July, 1992), 395-411; Nadia Kim, “The Migration of White Racism to South Korea,” Conference Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Boston, MA, August 1-4, 2008, Retrieved April 6, 2009 from SocINDEX with Full Text; idem, “‘Seoul-America’ on America’s ‘Soul’: South Koreans and Korean Immigrants Navigate Global White Racial Ideology,” *Critical Sociology*, Vol. 32, No. 2-3 (2006), 381-402; idem, “A View from Below: An Analysis of Korean Americans’ Racial Attitudes,” *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2004), 1-24; Dae Young Kim and L. Janelle Dance, “Korean-Black Relations: Contemporary Challenges, Scholarly Explanations, and Future Prospects,” in Hazel M. McFerson, ed., *Blacks and Asians: Crossings, Conflict and Commonality* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2006), 158-160.

<sup>5</sup> Regina Freer, “Black-Korean Conflict,” in Mark Baldassare, ed., *The Los Angeles Riots: Lessons for the Urban Future* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 176.

While Freer focused on the political economy behind the interethnic conflicts, many scholars tried to highlight “market relationships” inherent in the interaction between Blacks and Koreans in the inner-city and to frame the conflicts as occurring not between all Blacks and all Koreans but between Black customers and Korean merchants in Korean-owned mom-and-pop stores.<sup>6</sup> Not unexpectedly, several scholars have concentrated attention on processes in which clashes between customers and merchants over seemingly trivial matters such as prices and refunds were racially escalated into the conflicts between Blacks and Koreans. More often than not, these scholars placed blame on Black nationalists who viewed non-Black merchants as obstructing self-reliance in the Black community, while Korean American economist Shin Kim maintained that there were no local organizations to mobilize Black discontents into organized actions and that Black collective action against Korean merchants would be thus born spontaneously out of “emotional outburst” triggered by provocation from outside.<sup>7</sup>

In his seminal work on Korean American communities, Pyong Gap Min also examined the role played by Black nationalists in transforming Black discontents with Korean merchants into concerted actions. At the same time, however, Min depicted the structural position of Korean merchants as a middleman minority who distributed the product of White corporations to poor Black customers, stressing that such a middleman position could lead Korean merchants to

---

<sup>6</sup> Sumi K. Cho, “Korean Americans vs. African Americans: Conflict and Construction,” in Robert Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 198; Edward T. Chang and Jeannette Diaz-Veizades, *Ethnic Peace in the American City: Building Community in Los Angeles and Beyond* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 124-125.

<sup>7</sup> Shin Kim, “Conceptualization of Inter-Minority Group Conflict: Conflict between Korean Entrepreneurs and Black Local Residents,” in Tae-Hwan Kwak and Seong Hyong Lee, eds., *The Korean-American Community: Present and Future* (Seoul: Kyungnam University Press, 1991) 43-44. For roles played by Black nationalists in organizing the Black-Korean conflicts, see In-Jin Yoon, *On My Own: Korean Businesses and Race Relations in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 205-206; Ivan Light, Hadas Har-Chvi, and Kenneth Kan, “Black/Korean Conflict in Los Angeles,” in Seamus Dunn, ed., *Managing Divided Cities* (London: Keele University Press, 1994), 72-87.

experience dual scapegoating by the dominant group and the subordinate group in socioeconomic crisis. In particular, with regard to the Black-Korean conflicts, he insisted that, due to their lack of English proficiency and political power, Korean merchants became a scapegoat on which Blacks vented their frustration with their inability to improve the deteriorating economic conditions in the inner-city, in spite of the fact that the economic conditions were created primarily by racial and economic inequalities between Blacks and Whites.<sup>8</sup>

Although Edna Bonacich, a leading scholar on the middleman minority theory, also often admitted such a dual scapegoating mechanism, she emphasized the dual roles of Korean middleman merchants as “oppressed and oppressor.” Unlike Pyong Gap Min who has implied that the Black-Korean conflicts were a product of Black people’s misdirected frustration over their economic conditions, Bonacich helps us better understand the structure behind Black frustration by paying attention to power relations among the dominant group, the middlemen, and the subordinate group. According to Bonacich, while Korean merchants were exploited by American big corporations, they also participated in the exploitation of the oppressed by appropriating part of the surplus from them at “the front lines in the oppressive system.” Bonacich rightfully argued that it was because of the oppressor role played by the middleman merchants that Korean immigrants were perceived by the oppressed as “enemy” who exacerbated the poverty of the inner-city.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Pyong Gap Min, *Caught in the Middle: Korean Communities in New York and Los Angeles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 22-23, 100, 109-113, and 223.

<sup>9</sup> Edna Bonacich, “The Role of the Petite Bourgeoisie within Capitalism: A Response to Pyong Gap Min,” *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1989), 201; idem, “The Social Costs of Immigrant Entrepreneurship,” *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1988), 120; idem, “‘Making It’ in America: A Social Evaluation of the Ethics of Immigrant Entrepreneurship,” *Sociological Perspectives*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Oct., 1987), 455, 461; idem, “The Other Side of Ethnic Entrepreneurship: A Dialogue with Waldinger, Aldrich, Ward and Associates,” *International Migration Review*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Autumn, 1993), 689-690; idem, “Thoughts on Urban Unrest,” in Fred L. Pincus and Howard J. Ehrlich, eds., *Race and Ethnic Conflict: Contending Views on Prejudice, Discrimination, and Ethnviolence*

Similarly to the numerous previous studies, the original purpose of my research was to understand why the Black-Korean conflicts occurred. Yet, the more research I did, the less tenable it became to identify any single fundamental cause of the interethnic conflicts. It was undeniable that the cultural differences, communication barriers, and mutual prejudices contributed to the tensions between Blacks and Koreans. However, if the conflicts had been caused mainly by sociopsychological factors, they would have been easily resolved by a mutual understanding of their differences and a cooperative effort to communicate with each other. The structural and economic interpretations were also significant in shaping my understanding of external forces impinging on the Black-Korean conflicts and thus avoiding the default explanation of interethnic conflicts which tends to narrow down one's analytical attention to a game between two players only. However, if I understood the Black-Korean conflicts in terms of the structural and economic forces alone, I realized that we would be unable to grasp the significant roles of sociopsychological factors in fomenting and escalating the conflicts. Furthermore, these structural and economic approaches did not satisfactorily explain how structures could be translated into action. Some scholars have tried to focus on Black nationalism as a window for examining the relationship between structure and agency, but they did not explore what enabled the Korean middleman merchants to make sense of their experience with the conflicts and behave in certain ways. Although Bonacich has expanded our understanding of the structure of the Black-Korean conflicts, she has also fallen into the pitfall of structural determinism by paying little attention to ways in which Korean merchants actively responded to the interethnic conflicts to protect their interests and rights.

Caught in this dilemma, I found myself obliged to add another dimension of research.

---

(Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 406. See also Ivan Light and Edna Bonacich, *Immigrant Entrepreneurs: Koreans in Los Angeles 1965-1982* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 354-370.

The starting point of the previous studies in the Black-Korean conflicts was some conception of empirical social reality. The conflictual experience of Blacks and Koreans was presumed to originate from this reality, be it their sociopsychological differences or their structural and economic positions. In contrast to approaches that have pursued an empirical interpretation of social reality on the premise that it is expressed in the Black-Korean conflicts, this project argues that the experience of Blacks and Koreans was a discursive reality because, unlike the common notion that a reality is a “mere given” preceding discourses, it was within the realm of discourses that the social reality was categorically comprehended as an object of knowledge and defined as a possible cause of the Black-Korean conflicts.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, as feminist critic Chris Weedon put it in a different context, discursive fields not only “consist of competing ways of giving meaning to the world and of organizing social institutions and processes” but they also “offer the individual a range of modes of subjectivity.”<sup>11</sup> Likewise, with regard to the Black-Korean conflicts, the discursive fields, made up of a range of disparate and competing discourses, provided Blacks and Koreans with multiple and unequal subject positions from which they made sense of the social reality. It was within such fields that they also identified with, negotiated, and even challenged their subject positions. Therefore, rather than postulating an unmediated expressive relation between social reality and the Black-Korean conflicts and asking which factor played a more fundamental role in the Black-Korean conflicts, my work pays attention to the discursive realm that made it possible for Blacks

---

<sup>10</sup> For discussion of the relationship between reality and discourse, see Roland Barthes, “The Discourse of History,” in E. S. Shaffer, ed., *Comparative Criticism: A Yearbook*, Vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 17; Joan W. Scott, “After History?” *Common Knowledge*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1996), 9; Lionel Gossman, “History and Literature: Reproduction or Signification,” in Robert H. Canary and Henry Kozicki, eds., *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 30-33; Keith Jenkins, *Re-thinking History* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 50.

<sup>11</sup> Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (New York: Blackwell, 1987), 35.



and Koreans to assign different and often competing meanings to the social reality, to put themselves in favorable positions in the American system of social and racial stratification, and thereby to motivate themselves to act in certain ways.

The discursive dimension of the Black-Korean conflicts was highlighted by anthropologist Nancy Abelmann and sociologist John Lie who paid considerable attention to mainstream media framing of the interethnic conflicts. They argued that although there were “individual anger and passionate prejudices” between Blacks and Koreans, the conflicts were primarily a media construction that encoded American racial ideologies. Within the “discursive formation” of the media, according to Abelmann and Lie, Korean Americans were assigned the subject position of a hardworking, self-reliant, and family-oriented model minority, while Blacks were positioned as a pathological and welfare-dependent urban underclass lacking proper family values. The authors rightfully pointed out that such a framing functioned as a powerful tool in propagating the ideologies that the United States is still an open society without barriers to upward mobility for minorities and thus governmental or structural efforts are unnecessary to reduce poverty among minorities. Abelmann and Lie’s works offered many significant insights into how the Black-Korean conflicts were shaped by the media discourse. In addition, they also stressed that Korean Americans challenged the media representations pitting Blacks and Koreans against each other by producing their “counterstories” in which the conflicts were denounced as a result of media fabrication.<sup>12</sup>

However, it should be noted that Korean Americans were not always portrayed as the model minority. Abelmann and Lie did not consider that media representations of Korean

---

<sup>12</sup> Nancy Abelmann and John Lie, *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 148-180; John Lie and Nancy Abelmann, “The 1992 Los Angeles Riots and the ‘Black-Korean Conflict,’” in Kwang Chung Kim, ed., *Koreans in the Hood: Conflict with African Americans* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 78-81.

Americans were ambivalent and also varied according to non-discursive forces such as the demography of immigration and varying configurations of political power in particular cities. More importantly, the discursive dimension of the interethnic conflicts cannot be comprehended by analyzing only the media frame. Although it is evident that the media played a critical role in shaping the interethnic conflicts, news media are only part of the entire discursive field within which various discourses coalesced to produce a range of subject positions and knowledges of social reality. In order to understand the reason why Blacks and Koreans acted in certain ways, we therefore need to extend our analysis to include disparate discourses that they used to make sense of their experiences and organize them into a basis for action.

The ways in which Korean Americans understood their experiences showed similarity to the scholarly discourses on the Black-Korean conflicts. When confronted by incipient tensions with Blacks, Korean Americans sought to convert them into a more easily manageable problem that could be resolved by communication and cultural exchange. They also tried to understand the conflicts through the languages of media bashing. By arguing that the conflicts were manufactured by the media, Korean Americans tried to replace the frontline between themselves and Blacks with a new one drawn between minorities and dominant groups. Besides, Korean Americans sought to attribute the Black-Korean conflicts to tensions inherent in any transaction between customers and merchants. As the conflicts deepened and became more violent than ever, such languages of entrepreneurship increasingly portrayed Korean immigrant merchants as a hardworking model minority. These languages easily overlapped with the languages of criminality that enabled Korean Americans to delegitimize the Black discontent as troubles caused by a Black criminal underclass. In the process, several stereotypes were employed by Korean Americans to defeminize Black females and dehumanize Black males. After the Los Angeles riots of 1992, Korean Americans also resisted the mainstream riot discourse that they

were responsible for the eruption of the riots by collectively developing a melodramatic counternarrative in which they were imagined as innocent scapegoats. Not only did the melodramatic imagination paradoxically counterframe the 1992 riots back into a primarily Black-White dynamic, it also gave birth to rebellious Korean Oedipuses who defiantly confronted those who accused Korean Americans of being responsible for their own misfortune.

Instead of searching for the so-called fundamental causes of the Black-Korean conflicts, my work explores how the conflicts were shaped by discourses available to the two minority groups. In particular, my research examines how Korean Americans appropriated and resisted competing discourses to make sense of their experiences of hostility from the Black community in Los Angeles. In doing so, this study sheds new light on the politics of Korean immigrants who have long been labeled as apolitical even by co-ethnic scholars.<sup>13</sup> If we reduce politics to the electoral arena, there would be little doubt that Korean immigrants were by and large apolitical. However, if politics could be viewed as an activity for individuals and groups to “articulate, negotiate, implement, and enforce the competing claims” against each other through “the set of discourses or symbolic practices,” we could find that Korean immigrants were not apolitical spectators but active agents who desperately tried to protect their interests through discursive practices.<sup>14</sup> In order to highlight their agency, my work focuses on the political process in which Korean Americans subscribed to various discourses and mobilized them to defend their interests

---

<sup>13</sup> Jae Hyung Chai, “The Korean-American Community and U.S. Politics,” in Tae-Hwan Kwak and Seong Hyong Lee, eds., *The Korean-American Community: Present and Future* (Seoul: Kyungnam University Press, 1991), 94-97; Edward T. Chang, “Los Angeles ‘Riots’ and the Korean-American Community,” in Ho-Youn Kwon, ed., *Korean Americans: Conflict and Harmony* (Chicago: Center for Korean Studies, North Park College and Theological Seminary, 1994), 173; idem, “New Urban Crisis: Intra-Third World Conflict,” in Shirley Hune, Hyung-chan Kim, Stephen S. Fugita, and Amy Ling, eds., *Asian Americans: Comparative and Global Perspectives* (Pullman, Washington: Washington State University Press, 1991), 174.

<sup>14</sup> For such an understanding of politics, see Keith Michael Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 4.

and rights, avoiding a voluntaristic notion of agency by suggesting that non-discursive forces constrained their discursive practices.

Political scientist Claire Jean Kim, who examined the 1990 Black boycott of two Korean-owned stores in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, also emphasized that Korean Americans were active agents in American racial politics. Although her research dealt with interethnic tension in New York City, it provides valuable insights into implications of discursive practices of Korean Americans in Los Angeles. In the American racial order, according to Kim, Asian Americans, including Korean Americans, have been racialized through two simultaneous routes: they have been positioned by Whites above Blacks but below Whites along the axis of “superior/inferior,” but, at the same time, they have been rendered by Whites into permanent foreigners along the axis of “insider/foreigner.” Kim has persuasively argued that Korean Americans were “historical agents” who sought to protect their interests against the boycott by “racializing Blacks as the shiftless underclass and Korean immigrants as a model minority” along the first axis, while she strongly questioned the truth of the scapegoating story in which Korean immigrants were portrayed as bystanders innocently victimized for no fault of theirs.<sup>15</sup>

Like Kim, I do not buy into the scapegoating story; instead, however, I am interested in understanding Korean Americans’ discursive practices embedded in telling the story. Even though Korean Americans, as Kim has quite rightfully pointed out, were neither “passive victims” nor “disengaged bystanders,”<sup>16</sup> they repeatedly emphasized that they were innocent passersby as much as model minority immigrants. In particular, after the Los Angeles riots of 1992, they aggressively employed the scapegoating narrative to resist the riot discourse that blamed Korean

---

<sup>15</sup> Claire Jean Kim, *Bitter Fruit: The Politics of Black-Korean Conflict in New York City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 11, 15-17, and 187.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

Americans for instigating the mass violence. They argued that they were unjustly scapegoated because the riots, which were originally an expression of the Black-White dynamic, were transformed into an extension of the Black-Korean conflicts. In doing so, they constituted themselves as rebellious Oedipuses who confronted their accusers. Furthermore, to emphasize their innocence, Korean Americans negotiated their subject position presented even along the axis of “insider/foreigner” in such a way as to portray themselves as foreign newcomers who were not materially involved in causes of the event that occurred between Blacks and Whites. Therefore, at first glance, the scapegoating story seems to deny Korean Americans agency; however, if we try to understand the politics of scapegoat storytelling, it becomes clear that the story is an effective political discourse that provides Korean Americans with an affirmation of agency through a negation of agency.

Patrick D. Joyce also examined political aspects of the Black-Korean conflicts. Arguing that political institutions shaped the expressions and outcomes of conflict, Joyce suggested that machine-style politics in New York City tended to develop neighborhood organizations that were frequently willing to link individual disputes between merchants and customers to a political agenda advocating Black community control. Joyce maintained that New York City did not experience a large-scale eruption of violence because tensions were channeled into boycotts of Korean-owned stores through efforts to organize Black discontent before it would accumulate to the point of explosion. According to Joyce, the conflicts between Blacks and Koreans were expressed differently in Los Angeles because reform-style politics in the city did not promote the growth of community-based grassroots organizations. In Los Angeles, he convincingly explained, tensions were unorganized and therefore remained a potential source of mass violence.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Patrick D. Joyce, *No Fire Next Time: Black-Korean Conflicts and the Future of America's Cities* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 7, 56-64, and 169.

By examining the role of political institutions, Joyce successfully filled a lacuna in the cultural or structural understandings of the Black-Korean conflicts. He has led us into hitherto unexplored avenues by pointing out that political institutions “pattern the behavior of groups.”<sup>18</sup> However, it should be mentioned that the substantive content of behavior is shaped by discourses as well. By structuring perceptions of reality, discourses organize the ways in which people think, anticipate, and behave. Therefore, while agreeing with Joyce that the forms of conflict expression vary with the arrangement of political institutions, this study highlights heterogeneous discourses that influence and form perception, expectation, and behavior.

### Sources

Neither regional libraries nor university archives hold collection-level records pertaining to Korean American experiences of the interethnic conflicts. Therefore, to borrow Walter Benjamin’s words, I had to collect the overlooked “debris of history” in local libraries and archives to create a “montage.”<sup>19</sup> Despite the fact that much of the collected debris proved unrelated directly to my research topic, I was fortunate to be able to find valuable archival records while examining the Mayor Tom Bradley Administrative Papers housed in the

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>19</sup> Quote from Gerhard Richter, *Walter Benjamin and the Corpus of Autobiography* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 194. See also Derek Gregory, “Interventions in the Historical Geography of Modernity: Social Theory, Spatiality and the Politics of Representation,” *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, Vol. 73, No. 1 (1991), 26. My archival research has been conducted at Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research (20th Century Organizational Files and Collection of the Los Angeles riots of 1992); Department of Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles (Tom Bradley Administrative Papers); Special Collections Department, University of Southern California (Christopher Commission Papers and Webster Commission Papers); Department of Archives and Special Collections, Loyola Marymount University (Rebuild LA Collection and Which Way, LA? Collection); Los Angeles City Records Center and Archives; and Los Angeles County Records Center and Archives.

Department of Special Collections, University of California at Los Angeles. The papers were especially useful for the study of Korean American experiences because they included many relevant but previously untapped meeting minutes, memoranda, and documents preserved by Yoon Hee Kim who was a Mayor's Office liaison with the Los Angeles Korean American community as well as an active member of Korean American community organizations.

In order to listen to the voices of Korean Americans, I also conducted an extensive scan of Korean ethnic newspapers, most extensively the *Hankook Ilbo*. As the most widely circulated Korean-language newspaper in the United States, it has played the role of an ethnic public space for Korean Americans, whose voices were largely inaudible in the mainstream media. English-language ethnic newspapers such as the *Koreatown* and the *Korea Times*, an English language publication of the *Hankook Ilbo*, also provided valuable information about the ways Korean Americans made sense of their experiences. To examine how Blacks perceived the interethnic conflicts, I used the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, which has been the largest Black newspaper on the West Coast. I have also consulted the *Los Angeles Times* and numerous Nexis transcripts of TV and radio programs to get some sense of how Korean immigrant merchants were represented, how the Black-Korean conflicts were portrayed, and how the Los Angeles riots of 1992 were framed in the mainstream media.

### Chapter synopsis

This study focuses on the discursive practices of Korean Americans who experienced conflicts with Blacks in Los Angeles; however, it does not deny the importance of non-discursive factors such as economic and political structures as well as the impact of these factors on the way in which Korean Americans perceived the Black-Korean conflicts. Nor does it try to replace a

social explanation with a discourse analysis. Chapter one examines the field of non-discursive forces that have their own momentum and gravity. It asks why Korean immigrants, many of whom were college-educated and came from urban middle class strata of their home country, entered small businesses in the Black community in Los Angeles. I try to find answers to this question by examining not only a range of disadvantages faced by Korean immigrants in American society but also a series of effects of a turbulent urban restructuring specific to Los Angeles since 1965.

Korean immigrants were active agents who tried to overcome various disadvantages by running small businesses. From a structural point of view, however, these immigrant merchants in the Black community were a middleman minority group who played dual roles of “oppressed and oppressor.” Due to their oppressor role, they were considered to contribute to the exacerbation of the poverty in the Black community. Chapter two explores how various modes of discourse were utilized by Blacks to make sense of their interaction with Korean immigrant merchants. In chapter two, I also deal with the discursive realm within which Korean Americans assigned various meanings to the interaction. In doing so, I refute the notion that Korean immigrants were apolitical in dealing with the tension with Blacks.

The tension between Blacks and Koreans in Los Angeles began to be expressed in the form of boycotts of Korean-owned stores in the late 1980s and was seriously exacerbated when Latasha Harlins, a Black teenage girl, was murdered by Korean merchant Soon Ja Du in March 1991. When a Black male was shot to death by another Korean merchant in John’s Liquor Store in June 1991, the Black community launched a boycott that would last more than one hundred days. Chapter three discusses the responses of Korean Americans and local government officials to the boycotts. In particular, I use both the Korean ethnic newspaper and the official transcript of the trial of Soon Ja Du to examine the ways in which Korean Americans deracialized the murder



case, but at the same time reracialized Black bodies. Chapter three also shows how Korean community leaders of the 1.5/second generation cooperated with first generation immigrant leaders to respond to the John's Liquor Store boycott but ultimately failed in overcoming generational differences.

Los Angeles-based rapper Ice Cube, one of the founding members of West Coast gangsta rap, fueled enmity when he released the controversial song "Black Korea" in late 1991. Chapter four begins by discussing the collective response of Korean Americans to the song. Ice Cube's inflammatory message ("So pay respect to the Black fist. Or we'll burn your store, right down to a crisp") was materialized during the Los Angeles riots of 1992 which were triggered by the acquittal of four White LAPD officers on charges for the beating of Black motorist Rodney King. Although Korean Americans suffered tremendous damage from the riots, they experienced the most intolerable pain when they were accused of being the primary instigators of the riots. In chapter four, I focus on how Korean Americans created a counternarrative to such an accusatory discourse in a way to position themselves as innocent scapegoats. I also pay attention to the ways in which they constituted themselves as rebellious Oedipuses who challenged their accusers.

#### The use of the terms "Black" and "African American"

Throughout this study, I use the term "Black" to refer to both U.S.-born and immigrant individuals and communities of African descent. While Black residents in Los Angeles were predominantly native-born Americans of African descent, totaling 1.1 million in 1990, there was also a sharp increase in Black immigrants, mostly from Jamaica, Belize, and Nigeria. The number of Black immigrants in Los Angeles increased from 2,300 in 1970 to 31,415 in 1990.

Many settled in South Central Los Angeles.<sup>20</sup> Over the past several decades, there has been much controversy about the terms “Black” and “African American,” with some favoring the term “African American” over the term “Black.” In 1988, Jesse Jackson brought widespread community efforts to replace the word “Black” with the term “African American” into mainstream political discourse, arguing that the term “Black” was inaccurate: “Black does not describe our situation. In my household there are seven people and none of us have the same complexion.”<sup>21</sup> The term “African American” expresses an awareness of African cultural and historical heritage and continuity.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, others prefer the term “Black” because it carries a “political edge” that the neutral term “African American” does not.<sup>23</sup> Sociologist Philip T. Gay has argued in a *Los Angeles Times* article that the term “African American” obscures “the fact that the color of one’s skin is still of great consequence in America.” In this dissertation, following Gay’s critique, I use the term “Black” intentionally to criticize discourses of multiculturalism and color-blind.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Georges Sabagh and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, “Population Change: Immigration and Ethnic Transformation,” in Roger Waldinger and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, eds., *Ethnic Los Angeles* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996), 96; James P. Allen and Eugene Turner, *The Ethnic Quilt: Population Diversity in Southern California* (Northridge, Calif.: The Center for Geographical Studies, California State University, Northridge, 1997), 84.

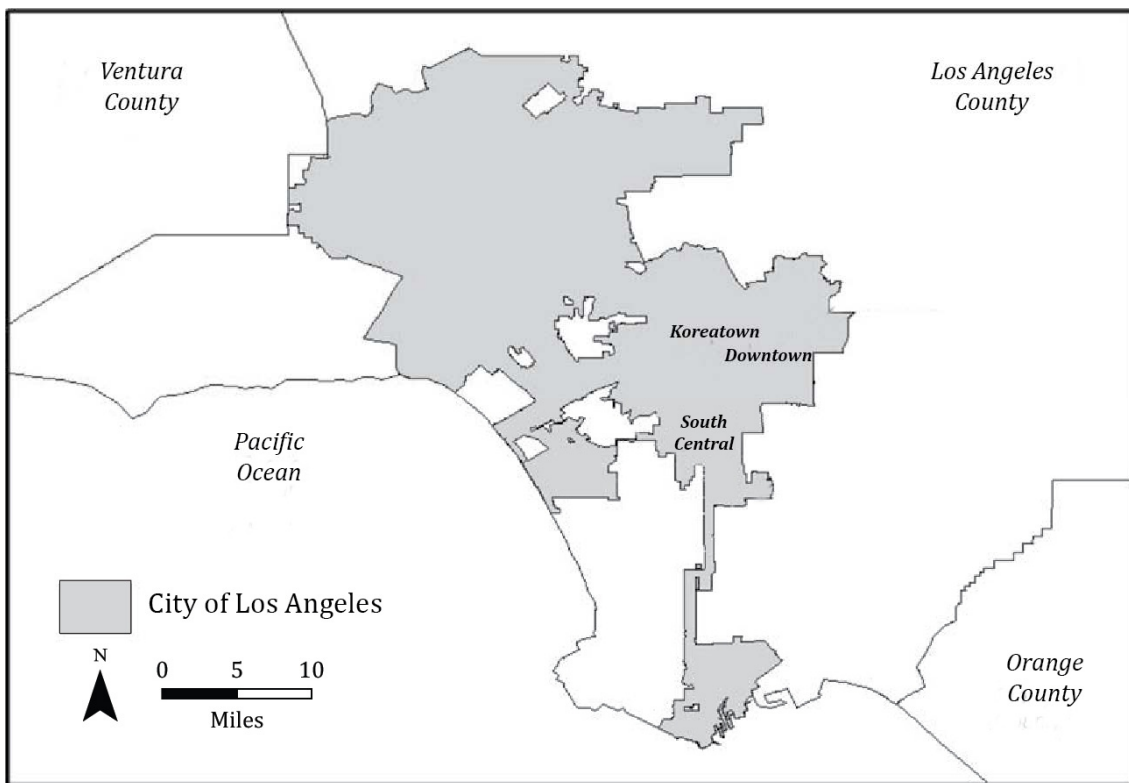
<sup>21</sup> Ben L. Martin, “From Negro to Black to African American: The Power of Names and Naming,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 106, No. 1 (1991), 91.

<sup>22</sup> Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, “Naming Ourselves: The Politics and Meaning of Self-designation,” in Robert L. Harris, Jr. and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, eds., *The Columbia Guide to African American History Since 1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 97.

<sup>23</sup> Elaine B. Richardson and Ronald L. Jackson II, “Preface,” in Elaine B. Richardson and Ronald L. Jackson II, eds., *African American Rhetoric(s): Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), xiv.

<sup>24</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, April 2, 1989. See also Kenny J. Whitby’s insightful discussion of the terms “Black” and “African American.” Kenny J. Whitby, *The Color of Representation: Congressional Behavior and Black Interests* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 8.

Figure 1: Koreatown, Downtown, and South Central Los Angeles  
(Map created by Youngjun Kim, Department of Urban Planning, UCLA)



## Chapter One

### Encounters between Koreans and Blacks in Los Angeles

Since the early decades of the twentieth century, the City of Los Angeles had been carefully constructed to feature and favor its White residents. Despite the pre-existing and continued presence of people of color, the city evoked “a slice of white bread” until the 1960s.<sup>1</sup> Upon the implementation of the Immigration Act of 1965, however, Los Angeles began to experience dramatic changes in its demographic landscape. Overwhelmed by the “ethnic explosion” in the city, *Time* magazine declared in 1983 that Los Angeles was being invaded by “exotic multitudes” from the countries of Asia and Latin America.<sup>2</sup> Five years later, Sanyika Shakur, a former gang member turned Black nationalist, came home to unfamiliar territory filled with alien multitudes conducting business on deteriorated streets: “Burned-out buildings and vacant houses took up whole blocks. Gas stations and liquor stores owned by Koreans were on every corner. Mexican merchants hung on corners, hawking oranges like dope.”<sup>3</sup>

Los Angeles was one of the most popular immigration destinations for Koreans and Latinos including Mexicans because there had been a booming economy and pre-existing co-ethnic settlements since the early twentieth century. Unlike most of the Latino immigrants, who had belonged to the poor and working classes in their home countries, a significant number of the Korean immigrants who entered the United States after the immigration reform in 1965 came

---

<sup>1</sup> Roger Waldinger and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, “The Making of a Multicultural Metropolis,” in Roger Waldinger and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, eds., *Ethnic Los Angeles* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Kurt Andersen, “New Ellis Island,” *Time* (June 13, 1983), 18.

<sup>3</sup> Sanyika Shakur, *Monster: The Autobiography of an L.A. Gang Member* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1993), 360.

from the urban middle class in Korea.<sup>4</sup> These middle class Koreans immigrated to the United States in search of new opportunities for mobility. It was not long, however, before they found themselves disadvantaged in the American labor market and found a means of survival by starting small businesses in Koreatown, three miles west of downtown Los Angeles, and in South Central Los Angeles, a huge region with a large Black population, located south of downtown Los Angeles.

Establishing small businesses in those areas provided Korean immigrants with the feeling of settling down. From a structural perspective, however, Korean immigrant merchants were a middleman minority who distributed the products of big corporations to poor Black customers in the inner-city. The lion's share of the surplus gleaned from subordinated consumers was claimed by the large corporations. Yet even as Korean middleman merchants were exploited as cheap labor by big capital, they were profiting by participating in an exploitative system. The Black community in Los Angeles developed hostility toward the Korean immigrant merchants largely due to the exploitative relationship between the two groups. In the first half of this chapter, I present a broad portrait of the post-1965 Korean immigrants to the United States. This can help us understand how non-discursive reality such as their class and migration background shaped the contours of their discursive practices associated with the Black-Korean conflicts. In the latter part of this chapter, I examine the social context in which the interethnic conflicts took place in Los Angeles.

---

<sup>4</sup> For the socioeconomic status of Mexican immigrants, see Timothy J. Henderson, *Beyond Borders: A History of Mexican Migration to the United States* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 90-117. For the socioeconomic background of Salvadorans and Guatemalans, the second and third largest Latino subgroups in Los Angeles, see David E. Lopez, Eric Popkin, and Edward Telles, "Central Americans: At the Bottom, Struggling to Get Ahead," in Roger Waldinger and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, eds., *Ethnic Los Angeles* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996), 279-304; see also Claudia Dorrington, "Salvadoran Immigrants and Refugees: Demographic and Socioeconomic Profiles," in Marta López-Garza and David R. Diaz, eds., *Asian and Latino Immigrants in a Restructuring Economy: The Metamorphosis of Southern California* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 393-424.

## Immigration of urban middle class Koreans

The first wave of Korean immigration constituted approximately seventy-five hundred workers recruited for Hawaiian plantations in the early twentieth century.<sup>5</sup> Koreans under Japanese colonial rule from 1910 to 1945 were subject to the 1924 U.S. Immigration Act, which barred the immigration of “aliens ineligible to citizenship.” Even after Korea was liberated from colonial rule, there were very few Koreans who were able to enter the United States because they were still considered aliens ineligible for naturalization. It was the Korean War from 1950 to 1953 that reinvigorated the dried-up flow of Korean immigration to the United States. More than half a million American troops fought during the war. After the war ended, however, the United States government continued to station about forty thousand soldiers in South Korea each year until there was a small reduction in the 1990s. Along with the adoption of Korean War orphans, interracial marriage between these stationed servicemen and Korean women became a primary route for the immigration of Koreans to the United States. These war brides and orphans, mostly lower class of Korean society, constituted one of the streams of Korean immigration to the United States.<sup>6</sup>

The other stream of Korean immigration was fashioned by the migration of U.S.

---

<sup>5</sup> Wayne Patterson, *The Ilse: First-Generation Korean Immigrants in Hawaii, 1903-1973* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press and Center for Korean Studies, 2000), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Pyong Gap Min, “Korean Americans,” in Pyong Gap Min, ed., *Asian Americans: Contemporary Trends and Issues* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1995), 202; Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Twayne, 1991), 140; Ji-Yeon Yuh, “Imagined Community: Sisterhood and Resistance among Korean Military Brides in America, 1950-1996,” in Shirley Hune and Gail M. Nomura, eds., *Asian/Pacific Islander American Women: A Historical Anthology* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 222-223; Illsoo Kim, “Korea and East Asia: Premigration Factors and U.S. Immigration Policy,” in James T. Fawcett and Benjamin V. Carino, eds., *Pacific Bridges: The New Immigration from Asia and the Pacific Islands* (Staten Islands, New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1987), 334.

corporations into South Korea. During the two decades after World War II, the U.S. economy experienced unprecedented growth. Due to international economic competition, however, corporate profits began to fall in the mid-1960s. Some American businesses tried to overcome the challenge by searching for new markets, developing new technology, and increasing productivity. But others undertook the strategy of “deindustrialization” by abandoning their loyal workers and relocating their industrial plants into suburbs and even into foreign countries in pursuit of cheap labor and/or tax incentives. Among the U.S. allies, Korea emerged as an attractive investment site for accessing extremely low wage labor and building a violently anti-union environment. Between 1979 and 1982, for example, American workers’ hourly wages averaged \$11.79, but Korean workers’ hourly wages were just \$1.22. To many U.S. firms, it appeared profitable to shift their assembly operations into a country with abundant access to low wage labor.<sup>7</sup>

Along with the eagerness of the military dictatorship under Park Chung Hee (1961-1979) for economic growth and modernization, U.S. capital in Korea helped to transform an underdeveloped agricultural Korean society into a rapidly developing industrial capitalist society based on an export-oriented economy. Accordingly, most Korean farmers experienced a process of being separated from their means of production and of becoming wage laborers. This proletarianization of the Korean workforce entailed a great internal migration of Korean farmers from rural areas to cities. Almost seven million farmers left their land to find jobs in urban areas between 1960 and 1975. The percentage of the population living in cities with at least fifty thousand residents increased from twenty-eight to fifty-two during the same span of time. For

---

<sup>7</sup> Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 15-16, 130; Bennett Harrison and Barry Bluestone, *The Great U-Turn: Corporate Restructuring and the Polarizing of America* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 11-13, 31-32.

urban dwellers, however, this rapid urbanization was a devastating development that caused a variety of urban problems: overcrowding, air pollution, a housing shortage, severe job competition, unemployment, and underemployment. In order to cope with these problems and at the same time to secure foreign exchange, the Korean government established its emigration policy in 1962 and encouraged an international migration of its people. Approximately seventeen thousand Koreans, most of whom had lived in cities, had gone to West Germany as miners and nurses by 1974.<sup>8</sup>

The immigration reform by the United States in 1965 provided another unexpected opportunity for international migration of the Koreans who were under the pressure of brutal industrialization and urbanization. The Immigration Act of 1965 abolished the racial aspects of the previous immigration laws, and instead established two main routes for immigration: one was occupational immigration for professionals, and the other was immigration through family reunification.<sup>9</sup> However, the reform was originally initiated to facilitate the immigration of

---

<sup>8</sup> In-Jin Yoon, *On My Own: Korean Businesses and Race Relations in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 62, 81; Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998 [1989]), 438; Illsoo Kim, "Korea and East Asia: Premigration Factors and U.S. Immigration Policy," in James T. Fawcett and Benjamin V. Carino, eds., *Pacific Bridges: The New Immigration from Asia and the Pacific Islands* (Staten Islands, New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1987), 336-338.

<sup>9</sup> Four decades prior to 1965, the 1924 Immigration Act established a quota system based on national origins that limited the number of immigrants from any country to two percent of each nationality represented in the 1890 U.S. census. The act aimed both to curb the immigration of southern and eastern Europeans, who had yet to arrive in great numbers before 1890, and to finalize restrictions imposed on Asian immigration by providing that "No aliens ineligible to citizenship shall be admitted to the United States." With the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Chinese had been prohibited from immigrating to the United States. Since the United States Supreme Court had held that Japanese and Asian Indians were not eligible for naturalization in the cases *Takao Ozawa v. United States* in 1922 and *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* in 1923, Japanese and Asian Indians were now also prohibited from immigrating. During the Japanese colonization of Korea (1910-1945), Koreans were also subject to the same restrictions. With the advent of the Cold War, however, the United States had to take into account how its domestic affairs were viewed abroad, especially in the Third World. As a response to criticisms of its race-based immigration policies, the United States removed the barrier of "aliens ineligible to citizenship" of the 1924 Immigration Act in 1952 and eventually abolished the national origins quota system in 1965. See Bill Ong Hing, *Making and Remaking Asian America through Immigration Policy, 1850-1990* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 19-38; Sucheng Chan, "Asian American Struggles for Civil, Political, Economic, and Social Rights," in Jean Yu-wen Shen Wu and Thomas C. Chen, eds., *Asian American Studies Now: A Critical Reader* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 217-221; Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 19-20.



southern and eastern Europeans rather than Asians. Lawmakers did not expect the immigration reform to ease the immigration of Asians. They believed there would be few Asians who could use the second route because their population in the United States was relatively small before 1965. The American Legion did not object to the reform on the grounds that the racial stock of immigrants would be the same as the earlier one in spite of the abolishment of the national origins quota system of the 1924 Immigration Act that had made it impossible for Asians “ineligible to citizenship” to enter the United States. Even Attorney General Robert Kennedy estimated that there would be no great flow of immigration from Asian countries after only five thousand of Asian immigrants might enter the United States in the first year.<sup>10</sup> In this way, the 1965 immigration reform was expected to prevent Asians from entering the United States in large numbers even though it did not include any obvious discriminative clauses against Asians.

Contrary to these widespread expectations, however, immigration from Asia began to increase dramatically after 1965. They were initially able to utilize the clause of occupational preferences and then linked it to a chain migration of family members. Koreans were certainly among the Asians who took advantage of the reformed immigration law to access desperately-sought opportunities abroad. Beginning with the full implementation of the Immigration Act of 1965 in 1968, the number of Korean immigrants had begun to increase conspicuously. In 1969, about six thousand Koreans immigrated to the United States. Their number reached approximately fourteen thousand in 1971. During the next decade (1971-1980), Koreans were the second largest Asian immigrant group behind only Filipinos.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> David M. Reimers, *Still the Golden Door: The Third World Comes to America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 75-77.

<sup>11</sup> Pyong Gap Min, *Caught in the Middle: Korean Communities in New York and Los Angeles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 28; Bill Ong Hing, *Making and Remaking Asian America through Immigration Policy, 1850-1990* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 95; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights,

Unlike the U.S. military wives and adopted war orphans who constituted the first stream of Korean immigration after the Korean War, a significant portion of the post-1965 Korean immigrants came from the urban middle class in Korea. If the draconian process of industrialization and urbanization had caused many Koreans to decide to leave their country, it appears logical to assume that the immigrants would have been composed of the most severely uprooted. But the immigration ticket was not available to everyone who wanted to leave. Because of the occupational preference system established for the immigration of professionals, it could be purchased only by those who qualified for the occupational categories such as physicians, nurses, and engineers and their families.

The middle class of Korea, like many lower and working class Koreans in cities, were experiencing the devastating process of modernization. Due to a huge expansion of higher education caused partly by the United States aid to education and mainly by the strong desire of Koreans for education as a means for social and economic mobility, there was a considerable increase in the proportion of educated middle class Koreans who had difficulty in finding jobs commensurate with their educational capital.<sup>12</sup> They were strongly influenced by the “American fantasy” or “American fever,” originally introduced through the presence of U.S. military forces.<sup>13</sup> Although anti-American sentiment had been culturally expressed through literature and open-air drama called *madanggŭk* since the United States Army Military Government in Korea

---

*The Economic Status of Americans of Asian Descent: An Exploratory Investigation* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1988), 21.

<sup>12</sup> In-Jin Yoon, *On My Own: Korean Businesses and Race Relations in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 64-67.

<sup>13</sup> Illsoo Kim, *New Urban Immigrants: The Korean Community in New York* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 59; Kyeyoung Park, *The Korean American Dream: Immigrants and Small Business in New York City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 29.

(USAMGIK, 1945-1948) was established in South Korea, it did not escalate to the level of anti-Americanism (*panmijuŭi*) as an integral part of the South Korean democratization movement until the late 1980s. The United States was imagined by the majority of Koreans as a “democratic, free, and modern” country.<sup>14</sup> Unlike those from the lower class, urban middle class Koreans also had the material means to realize their American dreams. To immigrate to the United States was considered a “passport for success” by many Koreans, but the passport could be bought only by urban middle class Koreans. These “new urban immigrants” constituted what some scholars named an “elite migration” or “interurban migration.”<sup>15</sup>

### Small business as a lifeboat

Most of the urban middle class Korean immigrants came to the United States in pursuit of economic and social mobility that was inaccessible to them in Korea. They were not forced out of their homeland by poverty. Their immigration was driven by their desire to enhance their economic status, not by economic survival.<sup>16</sup> The post-1965 Korean immigrants had also been

---

<sup>14</sup> Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 112. On the anti-American sentiment expressed in literature and *madanggŭk*, see Jae-Bong Lee, “Cultural Representation of Anti-Americanism: The Negative Images of the United States in South Korean Literature and Arts, 1945-1994,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Hawaii, 1994.

<sup>15</sup> Won Moo Hurh, *Comparative Study of Korean Immigrants in the United States: A Typological Approach* (San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1977), 44; Edward T. Chang, “New Urban Crisis: Korean-African American Relations,” in Kwang Chung Kim, ed., *Koreans in the Hood: Conflict with African Americans* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 56; Illsoo Kim, *New Urban Immigrants: The Korean Community in New York* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Won Moo Hurh, *Assimilation of the Korean Minority in the United States* (Elkins Park, PA: Philip Jaisohn Memorial Foundation, 1977), 13; Pyong Gap Min, *Caught in the Middle: Korean Communities in New York and Los Angeles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 31.

<sup>16</sup> Won Moo Hurh, *Assimilation of the Korean Minority in the United States* (Elkins Park, PA: Philip Jaisohn Memorial Foundation, 1977), 12

highly educated before immigrating to the United States. According to Hyun Sook Kim and Pyong Gap Min who had made a demographic analysis of the 1980 U.S. census, 31.6% of Korean immigrants who were twenty-five years old and over had completed four years of college, compared with 22.2% of all new immigrants and 16.2% of all Americans.<sup>17</sup>

Upon arriving in the United States, however, the urban middle class Korean immigrants realized that their educational capital was not useful in finding jobs. Because Korean schools were not often granted accreditation by American institutions, the educational capital could not be easily materialized. They also painfully found that the language barrier was much greater than they expected. Unlike Filipinos and Asian Indians, the Korean immigrants had low levels of English language proficiency, which negatively impacted their choices and income. Even Korean medical professionals had difficulty in pursuing their profession because they had to pass licensing examinations in English. Even if they passed the exam, they tended to be marginalized to serve at most “basic functions as physicians” in the American health care system. In addition to these disadvantages, there was a mismatch between their education and occupational opportunities. Last but not least, their unfamiliarity with American customs also severely reduced the possibility for them to find jobs corresponding to their educational background.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Hyun Sook Kim and Pyong Gap Min, “The Post-1965 Korean Immigrants: Their Characteristics and Settlement Patterns,” *Korea Journal of Population and Development*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Dec., 1992), 132.

<sup>18</sup> A lot of attention has been paid to these disadvantages of Korean immigrants to explain the reason for their dominance in the area of small business. For the disadvantage thesis, to name a few, see Pyong Gap Min, *Caught in the Middle: Korean Communities in New York and Los Angeles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 4; idem, “White-Collar Occupations to Small Business: Korean Immigrants’ Occupational Adjustment,” *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Summer, 1984), 350; In-Jin Yoon, *On My Own: Korean Businesses and Race Relations in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 5; Kyeyoung Park, *The Korean American Dream: Immigrants and Small Business in New York City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 29. For the disadvantage and marginalization of Korean medical professionals, see Edna Bonacich, “The Social Costs of Immigrant Entrepreneurship,” *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1988), 122; Eui Hang Shin and Kyung-Sup Chang, “Peripherization of Immigrant Professionals: Korean Physicians in the United States,” *International Migration Review*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Winter, 1988), 622.

All of these disadvantages forced the Korean immigrants to be self-employed in a small business. For them, “*anjöng*” was a critical issue. What the ideology of *anjöng* meant, as Kyeyoung Park explained in her study on Koreans in New York City, was not to aspire to being materially prosperous but to just settle down. To establish one’s own small business (“*chagigage katki*”) was considered the only remaining lifeboat to accomplish such *anjöng*.<sup>19</sup> In Los Angeles, urban middle class Korean immigrants faced with a range of disadvantages also tried to settle down by starting their own small businesses. Being closed off from finding professions suitable for their education, they began to set up diverse small businesses in and around Koreatown, which at that time was located slightly to the south of the present-day Koreatown. The years from 1975 to 1976 were commonly referred to as a watershed in the development of the commercial district in Koreatown.<sup>20</sup> After this period, the population of Korean immigrants in Los Angeles began to significantly increase. Several hundred small businesses owned by Korean immigrants sprang up along Pico and Olympic Boulevards between Western Avenue and Hoover Street.

Obviously, running a small business was extremely exhausting work. In In-Jin Yoon’s phrase, it was “bittersweet” to own a small business.<sup>21</sup> Korean small business owners had to work long hours. They risked their own lives in high crime urban neighborhoods. Many had to rely on the unpaid labor of wives and children to save labor costs.<sup>22</sup> Comparing his business to a

---

<sup>19</sup> Kyeyoung Park, *The Korean American Dream: Immigrants and Small Business in New York City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 3, 201.

<sup>20</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, August 30, 1983.

<sup>21</sup> In-Jin Yoon, *On My Own: Korean Businesses and Race Relations in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 6.

<sup>22</sup> The economic contributions of Korean immigrant wives to their families often lead to a significant realignment of gender relations at home. See In-Sook Lim, “Korean Immigrant Women’s Challenge to Gender Inequality at Home: The Interplay of Economic Resources, Gender, and Family,” *Gender and Society*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1997); Kyeyoung

“jail without bars,” a Korean liquor store owner sighed “I open the store at 7:00 a.m. and close at 11:30 p.m. I have to get up at 5:30 in the morning to be able to open the store on time. I don’t have time to eat breakfast. I eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner at the liquor store. This is my home. I live here. You ask me if I am happy here?”<sup>23</sup>

Table 1: Self-Employment Rates of Selected Groups (Ages 25-64, Employed) in Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside, and Ventura Counties

	1970 (%)	1980 (%)	1990 (%)
Salvadoran FB (foreign-born)	3.9	3.8	7.0
Guatemalan FB	N/A	3.3	7.8
Mexican NB (native-born)	4.7	5.3	6.3
Mexican FB	4.8	4.0	6.7
Japanese NB	18.6	15.1	10.9
Chinese NB	20.5	10.7	11.2
Chinese FB	11.5	16.5	16.6
Filipino FB	3.4	3.5	5.2
<b>Korean FB</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>24.8</b>	<b>34.6</b>
Blacks NB	6.3	4.4	5.8
Armenian FB	N/A	24.3	27.2
Iranian FB	N/A	20.9	27.8
Russian NB	N/A	22.9	23.4
Other White NB	10.1	12.0	13.3

Source: Ivan Light and Elizabeth Roach, “Self-Employment: Mobility Ladder or Economic Lifeboat?” in Roger Waldinger and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, eds., *Ethnic Los Angeles* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996), 199.

In spite of these hardships, operating small businesses enabled them to survive in their chosen country. It offered them a source of livelihood. By running small businesses, disadvantaged middle class Koreans managed to make a moderate income and were often able to

---

Park, *The Korean American Dream: Immigrants and Small Business in New York City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 113-138.

<sup>23</sup> Edward T. Chang, “New Urban Crisis: Korean-Black Conflicts in Los Angeles,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1990, 122.

send their children to American colleges. In that respect, the immigration of urban middle class Koreans is a dramatic story in itself. It suggests how the immigrants understood, responded to, and negotiated with their new environment. If the concept of agency could be defined as a “projective” capacity to imagine and generate alternative possibilities to respond “to the challenges and uncertainties of social life,” the history of urban middle class Korean immigrants is indeed a story of human agency.<sup>24</sup> Running small businesses provided such possibilities for these disadvantaged immigrants. Consequently, as Table 1 shows, there was a sharp increase in the self-employment rate of Korean immigrants in Los Angeles and its surrounding areas between 1970 and 1990. According to Pyong Gap Min who had interviewed 500 Korean immigrants in Los Angeles in 1986, the rates were even higher; in his estimation, 48% of them were self-employed and small business owners.<sup>25</sup>

However, such a conspicuous concentration of Korean immigrants in small businesses brought about a predominance of discourses advocating ethnic solidarity based on merchants’ interests and rights over cross-ethnic class solidarity in the Korean community. As Angie Y. Chung observed, Korean business owners and their various associations wielded significant influence over the Korean community along with church leaders and homeland-oriented immigrant organizations.<sup>26</sup> There were obviously a large number of Korean workers employed in Korean small businesses. However, these employees were often within family relationships

---

<sup>24</sup> Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, “What Is Agency?” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 103, No. 4 (Jan., 1998), 984.

<sup>25</sup> Pyong Gap Min, “Korean Immigrants in Los Angeles,” Paper presented at the Conference on California Immigrants in World Perspective, University of California, Los Angeles, Vol. 5, 1989-1990, 13, Retrieved April 21, 2008 from <http://repositories.cdlib.org/issr/volume5/2>; idem, *Caught in the Middle: Korean Communities in New York and Los Angeles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 48.

<sup>26</sup> Angie Y. Chung, *Legacies of Struggle: Conflict and Cooperation in Korean American Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 64-77.

with employers. Furthermore, they often had the same class background as their employers in South Korean society. As Pyong Gap Min noted, most Koreans also brought a considerable amount of money when they immigrated to the United States. Thus, even if they worked for co-ethnic businesses, this was largely because they wanted to learn how to run a business before opening their own businesses.<sup>27</sup> All of these circumstances led the Korean workers to identify their interests with those of business owners and prohibited the development of progressive political imagination advocating interethnic class solidarity in the Korean community. Especially, as I shall demonstrate in the next chapters, when business owners' interests and rights were at stake due to interethnic conflicts, such identification would cause languages of immigrant merchants to prevail in the Korean community.<sup>28</sup>

#### Internal resources for small business

Urban middle class Korean immigrants brought a sizable sum of money with them at the time of immigration. It enabled them to invest a higher average of equity capital in their new businesses than was typical of similar businesses run by other ethnic groups. A report prepared by the Korean Chamber of Commerce of Southern California in 1977 shows that the Korean immigrants who wanted to launch new businesses invested an average of \$17,860 in equity capital. Only 26% invested an average of less than \$10,000 in equity capital. This amount almost doubled during the next decade. According to Timothy Bates, the average of their investment in

---

<sup>27</sup> Pyong Gap Min, *Caught in the Middle: Korean Communities in New York and Los Angeles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 214.

<sup>28</sup> For the impact of immigrant small business on the class consciousness of immigrant workers, see also Edna Bonacich, "The Social Cost of Immigrant Entrepreneurship," *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1988), 126-127.



equity capital amounted to \$33,831, while Blacks invested an average of \$9,253 in equity capital.<sup>29</sup> In addition to personal wealth, the Koreans also had extensive cultural capital through their educational background. Although they were not able to find occupations commensurable with their educational capital in the mainstream labor market, it helped them succeed even in the small business sector. As Bates analyzed, having such educational resources was sure to be one of the determining factors of the longevity and success of minority-owned small businesses.<sup>30</sup>

Korean immigrants were also able to use “*kyes*” (rotating credit associations) to finance their businesses. As an institutionalization of social trust, “*kyes*” operate on the principle that each member of the association contributes slightly different amounts of money to a collective fund, the whole sum of which is supposed to be given to one contributor in rotation. Generally, the first recipient tends to be the one who needs capital most urgently and thus he/she contributes a greater sum of money than the other members in each rotation. The “*kyes*” were so widely used among Korean immigrants to finance capital for various purposes that even Hanmi Bank, one of the largest Korean ethnic banks in the United States, attempted to develop a new installment savings plan similar to the rotating credit associations.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, Korean small businesses were assisted by formal financial institutions such as Korean ethnic banks. Between 1974 and 1991, seven Korean ethnic banks opened in the Los Angeles area. Most of them were established in the 1980s, during which the population of

---

<sup>29</sup> Hyung Ki Chin, “The Survey of Business and Management of Korean Firms in Southern California,” in Byung Wook Yoon, ed., *The Survey of Socio-Economic Status of Korean Residents in Southern California* (Los Angeles: Korean Chamber of Commerce of Southern California, 1977), 24; Timothy Bates, “An Analysis of Korean-Immigrant-Owned Small-Business Start-Ups with Comparisons to African-American- and Nonminority-Owned Firms,” *Urban Affairs Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Dec., 1994), 245.

<sup>30</sup> Timothy Bates, *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>31</sup> Ivan Light, Im Jung Kwuon, and Deng Zhong, “Korean Rotating Credit Associations in Los Angeles,” *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1990), 40-41; *Los Angeles Times*, October 5, 1988.

Korean immigrants dramatically increased. These Korean ethnic banks placed a much higher emphasis on business loans than mainstream banks and other ethnic banks. The “business-loan oriented” Korean ethnic banks helped Koreans who often had limited credit histories build their start-up capital. They even allowed the Korean immigrants to use their property in Korea as collateral.<sup>32</sup>

Besides, most Koreans were exposed to the small business environment before immigrating to the United States. While the number of wage laborers increased with the industrialization in Korea after the 1960s, the number of non-agricultural self-employed did not sharply decrease at all. The continuous dissolution of agricultural sector forced those uprooted from rural areas to internally migrate to cities to find industrial jobs. Most of them became wage laborers, but a significant number of the uprooted who could not be absorbed by capital found self-employment as a means to survive in cities. At the same time, the low wages and harsh working conditions of urban industries produced the deproletarianized, most of whom also found self-employment as an alternative to being wage laborers.<sup>33</sup> As a result, self-employment in small business was one of the most prevalent occupations in the 1970s and 1980s in South Korea. It made many Koreans familiar with small business. This pre-immigration socialization functioned as an available resource by providing a “feasible alternative” for the Korean

---

<sup>32</sup> Hyeon-Hyo Ahn and Jang-Pyo Hong, “The Evolution of Korean Ethnic Banks in California,” *Journal of Korean Association of Regional Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1999), 107-111; Hyeon-Hyo Ahn and Yun-Sun Chung, “The Financial Development of Korean Americans: A Comparison of Korean and Chinese American Banks in California,” *Journal of Korean Association of Regional Geographers*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2006), 155, 160; Tamara K. Nopper, “Beyond the Bootstrap: How Korean Banks and U.S. Government Institutions Contribute to Korean Immigrant Entrepreneurship in the United States,” Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, 2008, 116.

<sup>33</sup> Kwan-Mo Suh, “Hyöndae Han’guk Sahoeüi Kyegüp Kusöng [The Class Structure in Contemporary Korean Society],” in Jin-Kyun Kim, ed., *Han’guk Sahoeüi Kyegüp Yöng’gu [A Study of Social Classes in Korean Society]*, Vol. 1 (Seoul: Hanul, 1985), 121, 125.

immigrants who were disadvantaged in finding jobs in their professions.<sup>34</sup>

Last but certainly not least, the widespread ideology of free enterprise that had largely been imported from the United States during the presidency of Park Chung Hee (1961-1979) led many Koreans to start small businesses.<sup>35</sup> After Park Chung Hee seized power in a military coup in 1961, one of the first acts of his government was to nationalize banks.<sup>36</sup> Under Park's authoritarian leadership, the state intervened extensively in the economy by fostering state-owned enterprises. The economic strategy of the Park regime moved further away from, not towards, the free enterprise model, expanding government intervention in the economy. However, the need for military and economic assistance from the United States placed increasing pressure on the authoritarian government to deregulate the economy.<sup>37</sup> Ideological memes promoting free enterprise were deployed by the U.S. government as "cold war projectiles" in the fight against communism abroad.<sup>38</sup> Less-developed countries were encouraged to accept the free enterprise

---

<sup>34</sup> In-Jin Yoon, *On My Own: Korean Businesses and Race Relations in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 28-29; Hyun Sook Kim and Pyong Gap Min, "The Post-1965 Korean Immigrants: Their Characteristics and Settlement Patterns," *Korea Journal of Population and Development*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Dec., 1992), 134.

<sup>35</sup> In the United States, the free enterprise ideology was actively promoted by corporate leaders and their allies as a means for the "intellectual reconquest of America" after World War II. Fearing a postwar alliance between organized labor and New Deal liberals, the business community sought to inculcate the American public with free enterprise ideology by invoking political languages of the Progressive Era that emphasized individual initiative and harmony between labor and capital. With the advent of the Cold War, business exploited a wave of anti-communist sentiment to promote "individual freedom and liberty" at home. See Elizabeth A. Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-60* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 15-17, 161-162, and 285-286. See also Wendy L. Wall, *Inventing the "American Way": The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 48-49.

<sup>36</sup> Alice H. Amsden, *Asia's Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 16.

<sup>37</sup> Chung-in Moon and Byung-joon Jun, "Modernization Strategy: Ideas and Influences," in Byung-Kook Kim and Ezra F. Vogel, eds., *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 135-137; Young-chol Cho, "The *Chaebol* Regime and the Developmental Coalition of Domination," in Byeong-cheon Lee, ed., *Developmental Dictatorship and the Park Chung-Hee Era: The Shaping of Modernity in the Republic of Korea* (Paramus, New Jersey: Homa & Sekey, 2006), 115.

<sup>38</sup> Cynthia Lee Henthorn, *From Submarines to Suburbs: Selling a Better America, 1939-1959* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio

system if they wanted to receive foreign aid from the United States.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, as John Lie has argued, Park's association with the South Korean Workers' Party before 1948 "rendered his espousal of free enterprises all the more urgent."<sup>40</sup> The free enterprise ideology with its emphasis on the value of individual initiative and self-reliance was easily combined with Park's emphasis on self-help, independence, and diligence as hallmarks of a modern citizenry.<sup>41</sup> These forces, combined with the systematic, policy-driven destruction of traditional economic means of subsistence, induced the uprooted and the deproletarianized to seek opportunity for social mobility through self-employment in small business.<sup>42</sup>

#### External resources for small business

While Koreans were able to deploy these internal resources, they were also assisted by external resources. However, most research on Korean Americans has tended to place an emphasis on internal resources only. Kwang Chung Kim and Shin Kim insisted that Korean immigrants did not receive any assistance from the U.S. government but relied "heavily on their own resources and those of their ethnic groups." Edward T. Chang also maintained that it was

---

University Press, 2006), 238.

<sup>39</sup> Raghbir S. Basi, "Role of the 'Free Enterprise' Ideology in Less-Developed Countries," *Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (1967), 173.

<sup>40</sup> John Lie, *Han Unbound: The Political Economy of South Korea* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 90.

<sup>41</sup> On Park's slogans, see Hyung-A Kim, *Korea's Development under Park Chung Hee: Rapid Industrialization, 1961-79* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 137.

<sup>42</sup> For a discussion of small entrepreneurship as a channel of upward social mobility in Korea in the 1970s, see Hagen Koo, "Small Entrepreneurship in a Developing Society: Patterns of Labor Absorption and Social Mobility," *Social Forces*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (1976).

nothing less than a myth to think they were assisted by the government. In another study, co-authored with Jeannette Diaz-Veizades, Chang emphasized that they became prosperous by mobilizing “internally generated capital.”<sup>43</sup> However, this discourse of self-sufficiency---that despite severe discrimination and disadvantages, they did not request any public assistance and could finally achieve the American Dream by relying on their strong work ethic and resources from their own community---is a reinscription of the myth of the model minority, a powerful narrative deployed against Black or Latino charges of discrimination and demands for equity.

It is undeniable that the Koreans used internal resources to overcome many disadvantages they faced in the new country. Without these resources, it would have been more difficult for them to start small businesses. However, Korean immigrants did not hesitate to request governmental assistance. It was not rare that the elderly Koreans lived in government-subsidized housing and received free medical care. One social worker in Los Angeles reported that the Korean immigrants were “aggressive” in the matter of welfare payments.<sup>44</sup> According to Bonacich, Light, and Wong, Korean ethnic organizations and the Korean press helped their community members access non-Korean community resources and led them to various public agencies.<sup>45</sup> The development of Korean small business was also assisted or even encouraged by the U.S. government and financial institutions. Korean immigrants could start small businesses by utilizing these external resources along with diverse internal resources.

---

<sup>43</sup> Kwang Chung Kim and Shin Kim, “The Multiracial Nature of Los Angeles Unrest in 1992,” in Kwang Chung Kim, ed., *Koreans in the Hood: Conflict with African Americans* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 30; Edward T. Chang, “New Urban Crisis: Korean-African American Relations,” in *ibid.*, 52; Edward T. Chang and Jeannette Diaz-Veizades, *Ethnic Peace in the American City: Building Community in Los Angeles and Beyond* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 31.

<sup>44</sup> *Koreatown*, January 21, 1980, K.W. (Kyung Won) Lee Papers, D-251, Department of Special Collections, University of California Library, Davis, California, Retrieved August 8, 2008 from the Online Archive of California.

<sup>45</sup> Edna Bonacich, Ivan Light, and Charles Choy Wong, “Small Business among Koreans in Los Angeles,” 11-12, Retrieved November 13, 2008 from ERIC database.

First of all, the U.S. government promulgated the investor's exemption after enacting the Immigration Act of 1965. It exempted prospective immigrants who could not use any preference categories of the 1965 immigration law from obtaining a labor certificate and made it possible for them to establish permanent resident status if these immigrants invested some amount of capital in a business in the United States. As of 1976, if prospective immigrants invested at least \$40,000, they could be classified into "businessmen and investors." Furthermore, in 1981, the U.S. Congress passed a bill that would get rid of the numerical limitations on these foreign businessmen and investors. By using this provision, about twenty-six hundred Koreans were successfully granted green cards between 1966 and 1975. Approximately seven thousand more Koreans were able to establish their permanent resident status through this exemption from 1976 to 1990.<sup>46</sup>

Secondly, the Korean immigrants could take loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration. During and after the Civil Rights Movement, SBA lending was operated as a racial uplift program. Blacks were the principal beneficiary of this race-conscious loan program until 1978, when Jimmy Carter amended the program by signing Public Law 95-507. This law broadened the range of beneficiaries of the SBA program by acknowledging that non-minorities such as White female entrepreneurs could be disadvantaged. Along with this reduction of the racial emphasis, there was another important change in which Asian Americans emerged as the leading recipient among racial minorities. In 1980, Blacks took 38% of the total amount of SBA loans awarded to racial minorities, while Asian Americans took 18% of the loans. But, in 1990,

---

<sup>46</sup> Ivan Light and Edna Bonacich, *Immigrant Entrepreneurs: Koreans in Los Angeles, 1965-1982* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991 [1988]), 404-405, 419; Edna Bonacich, "The Social Cost of Immigrant Entrepreneurship," *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1988), 121; In-Jin Yoon, *The Social Origins of Korean Immigration to the United States from 1965 to the Present* (Honolulu: East-West Center, 1993), 31-33; idem, *On My Own: Korean Businesses and Race Relations in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 82-83.

the proportion of the former decreased to 17%, while 55% of the loans for racial minorities were given to Asian Americans. Unfortunately, because the SBA does not publicly present ethnic specific data, it is impossible to measure the exact share of Korean Americans among the loans. But it would be safe to extrapolate from the general shift that the proportion of Koreans has been on the increase.<sup>47</sup>

Although based on unofficial data from SBA staff, David S. Kim and Charles Choy Wong also indicated that the SBA loans were regarded as an important source of initial capital by Koreans. According to their research, Koreans in Los Angeles County received one hundred and one loans from the SBA between 1971 and 1974. The total amount of the loans given to them was \$10,368,750. Among recipient businesses, liquor stores accounted for the largest share, which was thirty three loans totaling \$2,850,550.<sup>48</sup>

### Korean “commercial supremacy” in South Central Los Angeles

When faced with various disadvantages in the labor market after immigrating to the United States for economic and social mobility, the urban middle class Korean immigrants had

---

<sup>47</sup> Kilolo Kijakazi, *African-American Economic Development and Small Business Ownership* (New York: Garland, 1997), 28-29; Mark Eddy, “Minority and Women-Owned Business Programs of the Federal Government,” in S. N. Colamery, ed., *Affirmative Action: Catalyst or Albatross?* (Commack, New York: Nova Science, 1998), 147-149; Tamara K. Nopper, “Beyond the Bootstrap: How Korean Banks and U.S. Government Institutions Contribute to Korean Immigrant Entrepreneurship in the United States,” Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, 2008, 66-67.

<sup>48</sup> David S. Kim and Charles Choy Wong, “Business Development in Koreatown, Los Angeles,” in Hyung-chan Kim, ed., *The Korean Diaspora: Historical and Sociological Studies of Korean Immigration and Assimilation in North America* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 1977), 240-242. Based on his survey of 195 respondents, In-Jin Yoon insisted SBA loans were seldom used by Korean merchants in Los Angeles. According to his survey, only 8% of the respondents replied they obtained SBA loans while 7% of them answered they used “kyes” to raise start-up capital. It should be noted, however, that the average of SBA loans was \$102,660 according to David S. Kim’s data while the range of “kye” loans was usually from \$10,000 to \$30,000. Although the proportion of respondents who used SBA loans was similar to those who relied on “kye,” there was thus a significant difference in terms of the average amount of loans. See In-Jin Yoon, *On My Own: Korean Businesses and Race Relations in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 142-145.

no alternative but to establish small businesses by utilizing their internal and/or external resources. A statistical analysis by Bonacich and Jung of the 1977 Korean American business directory showed that Korean immigrants were disproportionately engaged in retail businesses. The field of retail trades accounted for 45% of the Korean businesses. In the late 1970s, the Korean retail stores constituted 2.74% of Los Angeles County's retail businesses, while the number of Koreans represented only 0.86% of the county's population. Among retail businesses, Koreans were highly conspicuous in the lines of mom-and-pop grocery stores and liquor stores: they owned 9.18% of grocery stores and 4.59% of liquor stores in the county.<sup>49</sup>

The concentration of Koreans in grocery and liquor retailing continued into the 1980s. According to an analysis of the fictitious business names published in the *Hankook Ilbo*, a Korean ethnic newspaper in Los Angeles, more than seventeen hundred Korean small businesses were newly opened in 1986. While Koreans were increasingly engaged in diverse small businesses in and around Koreatown, the analysis indicated, most of the new businesses located in other areas were concentrated in grocery or liquor retailing.<sup>50</sup> These lines of business were obviously favored by the Korean immigrants. The income was believed to be stable because most of the transactions were based on cash. They also felt that poor English proficiency was not crucial to the successful operation of these businesses.<sup>51</sup> As a result of this preference, the number of Korean grocery and liquor stores dramatically increased by 750% in Los Angeles County between 1977 and 1991. Korean small business entrepreneurs owned 39% of grocery and

---

<sup>49</sup> Edna Bonacich and Tae Hwan Jung, "A Portrait of Korean Small Business in Los Angeles: 1977," in Eui-Young Yu, Earl H. Philips, and Eun Sik Yang, eds., *Koreans in Los Angeles: Prospects and Promises* (Los Angeles: Koryo Research Institute, 1982), 79-82, 88.

<sup>50</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, January 3, 1987.

<sup>51</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, April 23, 1986.



liquor stores in the county by 1991. This rate of increase of Korean grocery and liquor stores was also five to six times higher than that of the Korean population in the county during a similar span of time.<sup>52</sup>

The growth of Korean grocery and liquor retail businesses was more conspicuous in South Central Los Angeles, which was already notorious for its excessive number of liquor outlets. As Mary Lee noted, most of these outlets had been small corner stores before the 1950s. It was not common that they dealt in alcoholic beverages. During the 1950s, however, the entrance of some large and modern supermarkets into the area drove these small corner stores to the wall and forced them to increasingly rely on selling alcoholic beverages as a means to survive.<sup>53</sup> However, the large supermarkets did not stay in the inner-city for long. They relocated to the suburbs in a hurry to follow the migration of people and jobs. The Watts riots of 1965 accelerated their flight from South Central Los Angeles. Their abandonment eventually resulted in the proliferation of liquor outlets by forcing the inner-city residents to rely on these small stores for necessities.

Most of these stores were Jewish-owned before 1965. It is well known that the Jews built their economic base in the Westside of Los Angeles by the 1950s after being excluded from Los Angeles's downtown Protestant elite who had migrated from the Midwest in the early twentieth century and governed the city with their own vision of good community ("spacious,

---

<sup>52</sup> The number of Korean grocery and liquor stores in Los Angeles County was 292 in 1977 and it has swollen to 2,487 by 1991. See Edna Bonacich and Tae Hwan Jung, op. cit., 82 and *Hankook Ilbo*, June 13, 1991. Meanwhile, it was estimated that the Korean population in the county was 58,521 in 1977. It has increased to 145,431 by 1990. See Edna Bonacich and Tae Hwan Jung, op. cit., 79 and Pyong Gap Min, *Caught in the Middle: Korean Communities in New York and Los Angeles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 34.

<sup>53</sup> Mary Lee, *Drowning in Alcohol: Retail Outlet Density, Economic Decline, and Revitalization in South L.A.* (San Rafael, Calif.: Marin Institute for the Prevention of Alcohol and Other Drug Problems, 1998), 15-16.

affluent, clean, permanent, predictable, and homogeneous”).<sup>54</sup> Somewhat less well known is the fact that, unlike these wealthy Jews, poor and often Yiddish-speaking Jews who migrated from eastern Europe in the 1890s had settled in immigrant and working class neighborhoods including South Central Los Angeles even before a huge influx of Black migrants from the South in the 1940s and 50s.<sup>55</sup> Since then, a large number of furniture, jewelry, and liquor stores in South Central Los Angeles had been owned by the Jewish people. Tensions abounded between Black residents and these Jewish merchants, who were often charged with price gouging and loan sharking. Triggered by an arrest of Black youth by the California Highway Patrol, the Watts riots of 1965 caused significant damage to these Jewish merchants and stimulated their massive flight from South Central Los Angeles, leaving a void that would be filled by Black merchants.<sup>56</sup>

This change of ownership was also assisted by the U.S. Small Business Administration. Until the late 1960s, according to Mosher and Mottl, the SBA did not grant any loans to businesses wherein selling alcoholic beverages comprised more than half their gross receipts. After a series of urban riots in the late 1960s, however, the regulation was repealed by the SBA, which no longer considered liquor outlets “suspect businesses.” Rather, these alcoholic beverage outlets came to be conceived as one of the few successful types of minority businesses.<sup>57</sup> In this

---

<sup>54</sup> For the migration of Midwesterners to Los Angeles and their vision of community, see Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993 [1967]), 145. For the development of the Jewish economic base in the Westside of Los Angeles, see Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 121-125.

<sup>55</sup> For the migration of poor Jews to Los Angeles, see Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 29-30.

<sup>56</sup> For the Black complaints about White merchants, see Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), 307-311; Robert M. Fogelson, “White on Black: A Critique of the McCone Commission Report on the Los Angeles Riots,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 82, No. 3 (1967), 352-357. For an underestimation of the Black complaints, see Governor’s Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, *Violence in the City: An End or a Beginning?* (Los Angeles: California Governor’s Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, 1965), 62-65.

<sup>57</sup> James F. Mosher and Joseph R. Mottl, “The Role of Nonalcohol Agencies in Federal Regulation of Drinking Behavior and Consequences,” in Mark H. Moore and Dean R. Gerstein, eds., *Alcohol and Public Policy: Beyond the*

sense, it could be maintained that the U.S. government agency provided significant monetary assistance for the over-concentration of liquor outlets while the large supermarkets created captive customers for the proliferation of liquor outlets by withdrawing themselves from South Central Los Angeles.

With the SBA loans, many Blacks were able to purchase a number of stores abandoned by the Jewish merchants. Many of the Black-owned grocery and liquor stores thrived in the 1970s. But most of the owners became increasingly exhausted by long work hours, crime, and violence. It was after the deregulation of liquor prices in 1978 that they decided to sell their stores. While liquor prices were fixed by the government before 1978, the deregulation caused severe price wars that resulted in the shrinking of margin. Just then, a number of disadvantaged urban middle class Korean immigrants were desperately seeking their lifeboats to survive in the United States.<sup>58</sup> The disadvantaged immigrants did not miss an opportunity. They needed a means of survival. As one Korean liquor store owner said, South Central Los Angeles was a preferred place where one could begin one's business with a small amount of start-up capital.<sup>59</sup> The high crime rate of the area was offset by the low entry prices. Most importantly, unlike local residents who had difficulty even in raising the low initial capital, they had available internal and/or external resources. Some of them could raise funds from the personal savings or "kyes." Others could build start-up capital by using formal financial institutions. Even the SBA provided a few Korean immigrants with financial assistance. Furthermore, the existing store owners tended to prefer Korean immigrants because they more often than not offered higher purchasing

---

*Shadow of Prohibition* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1981), 450.

<sup>58</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, May 15, 1992.

<sup>59</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, January 1, 1992.

prices or involved less credit than Black prospective buyers.<sup>60</sup>

Hence, there was a major transfer of ownership to Korean merchants in the mid-to-late 1980s. There were somewhat different estimates of the number of Korean grocery and liquor stores. According to the *Hankook Ilbo*, there were three hundred Korean grocery and liquor outlets in South Central Los Angeles as of January 1992. Based on data by an association of Korean grocers, however, Edward T. Chang estimated that there were 203 Korean grocery stores and 166 Korean liquor stores in the area in 1989.<sup>61</sup> Meanwhile, according to a report released in 1992, there were six hundred eighty two alcohol licenses in the inner-city: one half was the “type 20” license for off-sale beer and wine only and the other half was the “type 21” license for off-sale beer, wine, and distilled spirits.<sup>62</sup> The former license was owned by most of the grocery stores and the latter full license was given to only the liquor stores. If we use a conservative figure of three hundred Korean stores, they represented 44% of all grocery and liquor outlets in South Central Los Angeles. If we adopt Chang’s figure, it would increase to 54% of the stores.

As some Korean scholars insisted, Blacks were admittedly not a majority of customers of Korean businesses in Southern California. Blacks were said to constitute only 10% of their customers. Therefore, as Edward T. Chang emphatically insisted, it would be erroneous to

---

<sup>60</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, May 15, 1992

<sup>61</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, January 1, 1992; Edward T. Chang, “New Urban Crisis: Korean-Black Conflicts in Los Angeles,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1990, 103.

<sup>62</sup> Mayor Bradley’s South Central Community/Merchant Liquor Task Force, *Final Report*, November 18, 1992, 1, folder 15, box 4252, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers, Charles E. Young Library, UCLA. Strictly speaking, as Mary Lee pointed out, the term of “liquor store” was applied only to an alcohol outlet that was licensed by the state Department of Alcohol Beverage Control to sell distilled spirits along with beer and wine. There was also a numerical limitation by state law on the number of liquor stores, specifically, that one liquor license should be issued for every 2,500 residents in a county. The alcohol outlets licensed by the state department to sell beer and wine only were largely composed of local grocery stores and were not given any numerical limitations. Although the latter outlets were not licensed to sell distilled spirits, the term of “liquor store” has been popularly used to refer to both types of outlets. See, Mary Lee, *Drowning in Alcohol: Retail Outlet Density, Economic Decline, and Revitalization in South L.A.* (San Rafael, Calif.: Marin Institute for the Prevention of Alcohol and Other Drug Problems, 1998), 35.

assume that Korean immigrant merchants were doing their businesses only in South Central Los Angeles.<sup>63</sup> However, a different picture will emerge if we bring South Central Los Angeles into focus. As mentioned above, about half the grocery and liquor outlets in the area were owned by Korean merchants. The contour in the picture will be more clearly defined if we take other retail businesses into consideration. According to a study published on the *Hankook Ilbo* in 1992, there were at least twenty swap meet malls in South Central Los Angeles. In leased “booths” of the malls, almost one thousand Koreans were selling either cheap products imported from Korea and other Asian countries or clothing supplied largely by the Korean garment industries in Los Angeles. In addition to the swap meet malls, about two hundred gas stations and one hundred dry cleaners, hamburger stands, wig shops, and beauty shops were owned by Koreans. It was reported that almost 80% of all retail stores became Korean-owned. It was such a tremendous expansion of Korean business in South Central Los Angeles that led a writer of the study to proclaim that “Koreans completely gained commercial supremacy in the area” within just six years after the mid-1980s.<sup>64</sup>

### Urban restructuring in Los Angeles

When Korean immigrants began to enter South Central Los Angeles to start small businesses, the area was undergoing significant urban restructuring that swept through Los

---

<sup>63</sup> Edward T. Chang, “New Urban Crisis: Korean-African American Relations,” in Kwang Chung Kim, ed., *Koreans in the Hood: Conflict with African Americans* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 52; Edward T. Chang and Angela E. Oh, “Korean American Dilemma: Violence, Vengeance, Vision,” in Dean A. Harris, ed., *Multiculturalism from the Margins: Non-Dominant Voices on Difference and Diversity* (Westport, Conn.: Bergin & Garvey, 1995), 133.

<sup>64</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, January 1, 1992.

Angeles in the 1970s and 80s. The urban restructuring created a captive market of Black consumers, a market that ironically provided the disadvantaged Korean immigrants with niches in which they found a means of survival. At the same time, it facilitated a process of deproletarianization of Blacks and thus dismantled a material base for progressive Black Los Angeles.

The period of the 1970s and 80s witnessed a great migration of Asians and Latinos to the United States. In particular, Latinos who migrated from Mexico and Central America began to reclaim Los Angeles in the 1980s and formed a “city-within-a city.”<sup>65</sup> While Salvadorans and Guatemalans, the second and third largest groups of Latino immigrants in Los Angeles, were largely concentrated in Pico-Union and Westlake areas just west of Downtown and east of Koreatown, many Mexican immigrants settled down in South Central Los Angeles. Due to their increased migration, the proportion of Latinos in the inner-city significantly increased from 9% to 44% of its total residents during just two decades.<sup>66</sup>

The significant growth of the Latino immigrant population in Los Angeles brought about severe competition between Blacks and Latinos over public services and jobs, stirring up anti-immigrant nativist sentiment that could also spread easily toward Asian immigrants in the

---

<sup>65</sup> Mike Davis, *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the US City* (London: Verso, 2000), 43.

<sup>66</sup> James P. Allen and Eugene Turner, *The Ethnic Quilt: Population Diversity in Southern California* (Northridge, Calif.: The Center for Geographical Studies, California State University, Northridge, 1997), 110; Ali Modarres, *The Racial and Ethnic Structure of Los Angeles: A Geographic Guide* (Los Angeles: Edmund G “Pat” Brown Institute of Public Affairs, California State University, Los Angeles, 1994), 47-50; João H. Costa Vargas, *Catching Hell in the City of Angels: Life and Meanings of Blackness in South Central Los Angeles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 53. The increase of Latino immigrants was not confined to South Central Los Angeles. As Georges Sabagh and Mehdi Bozorgmehr noted, there was an “explosion” of Latino immigrants “from about 400,000 to about 2.8 million” in Los Angeles between 1970 and 2000. While the Latino immigrants in Los Angeles were overwhelmingly composed of Mexicans, followed by Salvadorans and Guatemalans, their counterparts in New York were largely from Dominica, Columbia, Ecuador, and Peru. Georges Sabagh and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, “From ‘Give Me Your Poor’ to ‘Save Our State’: New York and Los Angeles as Immigrant Cities and Regions,” in David Halle, ed., *New York and Los Angeles: Politics, Society, and Culture: A Comparative View* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 104-105.

Black community. A compelling example of the Black-Latino conflicts in Los Angeles occurred over hiring practices of Martin Luther King Jr. Hospital/Charles Drew Medical Center in the mid-1980s. The hospital was built after the Watts riots of 1965 and had been a symbol of pride in the Black community. However, as the Latino population greatly increased in the area during the 1970s and 80s and made up one-third of the hospital's patients, the Black-run hospital became a source of contentious bickering between Blacks, who still made up the majority of the hospital's employees, and Latinos, who eagerly demanded an increase in the number of the hospital's Latino employees.<sup>67</sup>

Along with these demographic changes, Los Angeles was experiencing "the marginalization of cities in American social policy," which had originally taken place in Rust Belt cities. After postwar racial struggles in the urban industrial region, according to Thomas J. Sugrue, the federal government significantly reduced its spending on cities.<sup>68</sup> During the Reagan administration, Los Angeles was also undergoing such urban marginalization. In particular, the disinvestment in public spending on the city dealt a mortal blow to Blacks and Latinos in South Central Los Angeles by severely downsizing the Great Society-inspired social programs that had been vital to the survival of urban poor inhabitants since the 1960s.<sup>69</sup> While the city government

---

<sup>67</sup> For the Black-Latino conflicts at the Martin Luther King Jr. Hospital/Charles Drew Medical Center, see Nicolás C. Vaca, *The Presumed Alliance: The Unspoken Conflict between Latinos and Blacks and What It Means for America* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 56.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 4, 268.

<sup>69</sup> For the public disinvestment which took place in Los Angeles, see Mike Davis, "Who Killed LA? A Political Autopsy," *New Left Review*, No. 197 (1993), 9, 14; John R. Logan and Harvey L. Molotch, *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 245; Preston Niblack and Peter J. E. Stan, "Financing Public Services in Los Angeles," in James B. Steinberg, et al eds., *Urban America: Policy Choices for Los Angeles and the Nation* (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand Corporation, 1992), 267; U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, *The State of Urban America: Hearing before the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs*, 103rd Congress, 1st Session (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1993), 108; Linda Ashman, Jaime de la Vega, Marc Dohan, Andy Fisher, Rosa Hippler, and Billi Romain, *Seeds of Change: Strategies for Food Security for the Inner City* (Los Angeles: Graduate School of Architecture and Urban

of Los Angeles had been able to provide some benefits for poor residents by using federal grants, it was now forced to reduce the funds for social welfare and community development programs. As the city government was also increasingly dependent on private sector capital instead of on federal funding, the development of the inner-city was proportionately replaced by a corporate-oriented redevelopment project elevating the Downtown's skyline.<sup>70</sup>

Meanwhile, unlike Rust Belt cities, Los Angeles was going through reindustrialization in several industrial sectors. Firstly, the "military-centered Keynesianism" caused by the Cold War entailed a massive growth of the aerospace and electronics industries. But Blacks did not benefit at all from this development because there was a mismatch between their skills and the available occupations in the industries on one hand, and most of the high technology industries were located in the suburbs on the other hand. Secondly, Los Angeles was experiencing another reindustrialization by the development of very low skill manufacturing industries based on sweatshop exploitation of cheap labor forces provided by the incessant influx of immigrants. However, Blacks also experienced an exclusion from the latter reindustrialization because employers preferred Latino immigrant workers to Black workers. The Latino workers were often believed to be more docile and less complaining because of their vulnerability as immigrants.<sup>71</sup>

---

Planning, UCLA, 1993), 17-18, 25-26, 29.

<sup>70</sup> For the role of the city government of Los Angeles in exacerbating poverty in South Central Los Angeles, see Ron Curran, "Malign Neglect: The Roots of an Urban War Zone," *L.A. Weekly*, December 30, 1988-January 5, 1989, 12, 18; Susan Anderson, "A City Called Heaven: Black Enchantment and Despair in Los Angeles," in Allen J. Scott and Edward W. Soja, eds., *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 350; James A. Regalado, "Political Representation, Economic Development, Policymaking, and Social Crisis in Los Angeles, 1973-1992," in Gerry Riposa and Carolyn G. Dersch, eds., *City of Angels* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, 1992), 170-174; Cynthia Hamilton, *Apartheid in an American City: The Case of the Black Community in Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Labor/Community Strategy Center, 1987), 8.

<sup>71</sup> Edward W. Soja, "Los Angeles, 1965-1992: From Crisis-Generated Restructuring to Restructuring-Generated Crisis," in Allen J. Scott and Edward W. Soja, eds., *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 438-442; idem, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), 200-208; Allen J. Scott, "Industrial Urbanism in Late-Twentieth-Century Southern California," in Michael J. Dear, ed., *From Chicago to L.A.: Making Sense of*



To make matters worse, manufacturing industries began to leave South Central Los Angeles for suburban areas in pursuit of lower taxes, larger plants, and more profitable markets as early as 1963. It was the first phase in the deindustrialization in Southern California.<sup>72</sup> In the 1970s and 80s, heavy manufacturing industries such as General Motors, Goodyear, Firestone, Bethlehem Steel, and American Can also left South Central Los Angeles. Until their flight, these industries had provided more than twenty-five thousand unionized jobs and had also supported job growth in related industries. Their abandonment of South Central Los Angeles “literally pulled the plug on the entire economy of the area.”<sup>73</sup> By 1990, due to the deindustrialization, the unemployment rate among Blacks in South Central Los Angeles became over twice as high as the rate for the rest of Los Angeles County. In some areas in the inner-city, the unemployment rate was much higher than those in other areas to the extent that almost half of all Black males were left to become part of the jobless poor.<sup>74</sup> Such a devastating process of deproletarianization of Blacks resulted in the eventual withering away of left and working class organizations in the Los Angeles Black community. The dismantling of progressive Black Los Angeles in turn contributed to the creation of an ideological vacuum that, as I shall discuss in more detail in the

---

*Urban Theory* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2002), 164-167; Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 176-189; James H. Johnson, Jr. and Melvin L. Oliver, “Interethnic Minority Conflict in Urban America: The Effects of Economic and Social Dislocations,” *Urban Geography*, Vol. 10, No. 5 (1989), 452.

<sup>72</sup> Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 180.

<sup>73</sup> Labor/Community Strategy Center, *Reconstructing Los Angeles from the Bottom Up* (Los Angeles: Labor/Community Strategy Center, 1993), 8.

<sup>74</sup> Paul M. Ong, “Poverty and Employment Issues in the Inner Urban Core,” in Allen J. Scott and E. R. Brown, eds., *South-Central Los Angeles: Anatomy of an Urban Crisis*, Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies, UCLA, Working Paper No. 6 (1993), 11; James H. Johnson, Jr., Cloyzelle K. Jones, Walter C. Farrell, Jr., and Melvin L. Oliver, “The Los Angeles Rebellion: A Retrospective View,” *Economic Development Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (Nov., 1992), 361.

next chapter, would be often filled by depoliticized language.

The urban restructuring not only accelerated the deproletarianization of Blacks but also transformed South Central Los Angeles into a “negative space.”<sup>75</sup> The flight of large chain supermarkets from South Central Los Angeles exacerbated the negativity. As historian Meg Jacobs has pointed out, Blacks have often preferred large chain stores because they faced pervasive discrimination at local retail stores. With the advent of mass consumption in the early twentieth century, large chain stores had “implored all potential shoppers to enter, regardless of class or color,” their shops to increase sales volume.<sup>76</sup> According to Lizabeth Cohen who did considerable research on mass culture in Chicago during the interbellum period, Blacks also developed their preference for large chain stores over small retail stores because they felt standardized and packaged goods with price tags protected their rights as consumers.<sup>77</sup> The flight of large chain supermarkets left a void that was often filled by what David Caplovitz called a “*deviant system*” where “unethical and illegal practices” of local merchants were prevalent.<sup>78</sup> The abandonment of South Central Los Angeles by large chain stores began in the late 1950s and 1960s, moving to the suburbs along with people and jobs. For example, the number of Vons and Safeway stores in South Central Los Angeles was seventeen in 1963 but had decreased to eight by 1975. Vons was Southern California’s largest chain supermarket and Safeway had relatively

---

<sup>75</sup> Min Hyung Song, *Strange Future: Pessimism and the 1992 Los Angeles Riots* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 27.

<sup>76</sup> Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 20.

<sup>77</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 152-153.

<sup>78</sup> David Caplovitz, *The Poor Pay More: Consumer Practices of Low-Income Families* (New York: Free Press, 1963), 28-30.

many stores in the inner-city area. Taking Vons and Safeway together, as much as 82% of the two chain supermarkets disappeared from South Central Los Angeles between 1963 and 1991.<sup>79</sup>

In addition to the flight of supermarkets, there was also a flight of bank branches. In the late 1980s, almost twelve hundred bank branches disappeared and only sixty-one branches opened in Los Angeles County. South Central Los Angeles was in a more serious situation. Only twenty bank branches were there for about two hundred sixty thousand residents, while twenty-one branches served about fifty thousand people in the City of Gardena which was close to South Central Los Angeles.<sup>80</sup> What made matters worse was a flight of small retail stores. Before the Watts riots of 1965, as previously explained, most of the small retail stores were owned by the Jewish merchants. Like most of the ghetto merchants, they were stereotyped as “gouging merchants” and became a target of looting during the riots. This stimulated the merchants to begin a “wholesale” flight from the inner-city area.<sup>81</sup> Some of the void was filled by Black entrepreneurs after 1965. But many of these Black merchants also left their businesses by the mid-1980s in pursuit of more profitable opportunities.

That these various flights occurred in South Central Los Angeles ultimately meant that a significant disinvestment was taking place in the private sector. In particular, the flight of retail stores and large chain supermarkets left a vacuum that could be later utilized by the Korean

---

<sup>79</sup> Linda Ashman, Jaime de la Vega, Marc Dohan, Andy Fisher, Rosa Hippler, and Billi Romain, *Seeds of Change: Strategies for Food Security for the Inner City* (Los Angeles: Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Planning, UCLA, 1993), 111.

<sup>80</sup> Gilberto Aviles, “The Banking Services Outreach Project, Check Cashing, & Money Orders: A Commentary about Poor People’s Access to Financial Services,” M.A. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1991, 3; Assembly Special Committee on the Los Angeles Crisis, *To Rebuild Is Not Enough: Final Report and Recommendations of the Assembly Committee on the Los Angeles Crisis* (Sacramento: Assembly Publications Office, 1992), 12.

<sup>81</sup> Jonathan J. Bean, “‘Burn, Baby, Burn’: Small Business in the Urban Riots of the 1960s,” *The Independent Review*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Fall, 2000), 169-170; Josh Sides, “Straight into Compton: American Dreams, Urban Nightmares, and the Metamorphosis of a Black Suburb,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (Sep., 2004), 591.

immigrants who faced disadvantages in the labor market. The flight of bank branches also eventually contributed to the development of Korean small businesses. As the banks left the ghetto area, basic banking services were provided by check cashing establishments, most of which were operated by small retail store owners.<sup>82</sup> In this sense, a structural foundation on which Korean small businesses could develop was laid by the abandonment of the inner-city area by retail stores, large grocery stores, and bank branches. Although it is quite important to note that starting and running a small business was the process by which Korean immigrants exerted their agency to respond to various disadvantages, their entering South Central Los Angeles was also structurally shaped by the dynamics of disinvestment. In other words, what provided opportunities for the disadvantaged Koreans was the porous aspect of urban development. Without such niches, it would have been almost impossible for them to enter South Central Los Angeles to run small businesses.

#### Middleman minority as “oppressed-oppressor”

When South Central Los Angeles was being transformed into a “negative space” by the wholesale disinvestment in the public and private sectors, Korean immigrants began to enter the area to find a means to survive. Ironically, these disinvestments that swept through the inner-city provided the disadvantaged urban middle class Korean immigrants with opportunities to make a living. Korean immigrant merchants were able to scrape up money with internal and external resources to open small mom and pop stores. It was undeniable that these stores provided some convenience for local residents who had difficulty in buying daily necessities because of the

---

<sup>82</sup> Gilberto Aviles, op. cit., 24.

flight of large chain supermarkets. The underdevelopment of public transportation made it more difficult for them to use large grocery stores in distant areas. The grocery and liquor outlets owned by Korean merchants also offered check cashing services to the local residents for a fee. Although check cashing was virtually free in regular banks, the abandonment of South Central Los Angeles by banks led the mom and pop stores to partially play the role of banks.

Furthermore, Korean immigrant merchants made a significant contribution to the economy of South Central Los Angeles by developing indoor swap meet malls, which were a new kind of department store. The traditional swap meet was an outdoor mobile market where price-conscious customers could buy bargains or second-hand goods. The outdoor swap meets were usually held on weekends. Korean immigrants moved outdoor swap meet vendors indoors while simulating “open-air markets in South Korea.”<sup>83</sup> This allowed customers “to browse and shop seven days a week during traditional working hours.” The average space of a booth in a swap meet mall was one hundred twenty square feet and the monthly rent per square foot was three to five dollars in 1986. Although the rental rates of indoor swap meet malls were usually higher than those of other general stores, the indoor swap meet business was so popular among Korean immigrants that they were running two to three thousand small businesses in twenty-five Korean-owned indoor swap meet malls in Los Angeles by the mid-1980s.<sup>84</sup>

Korean immigrants were also able to purchase buildings abandoned by chain department stores in South Central Los Angeles to convert them into indoor swap meet malls. The first swap meet mall in the area was the Compton Fashion Center, with three hundred and

---

<sup>83</sup> Nancy Abelmann and John Lie, *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 140; Edward T. Chang, “Korean Swapmeets in Los Angeles: Economic and Racial Implications,” *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2004), 56.

<sup>84</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, March 19, 1986; March 26, 1986; May 2, 1986 (English Section).

fifty booths. A group of Korean immigrants purchased a huge single-floor building abandoned by Sears in 1979 for \$2.8 million and spent \$1.4 million to renovate it into an indoor swap meet in 1985. The Compton Fashion Center even provided a free shuttle bus service for customer convenience. Korean immigrants converted another large building abandoned by J. C. Penny in 1984 into the Inglewood Department Store with one hundred five vendors in 1986. As James Brown, a business development specialist for the Inglewood Redevelopment Agency, and Timothy Iverson, a director of Compton City's Economic and Grants Management Services, acknowledged, the Korean-owned indoor swap meets functioned as an "anchor" to draw "customers into the shopping area, thereby, benefiting other neighboring stores."<sup>85</sup>

From a structural point of view, however, Korean immigrant merchants were playing a middleman minority role between dominant groups as producers and other subordinate groups as minority customers in the inner-city. Admittedly, as In-Jin Yoon emphatically insisted, all Korean merchants in Los Angeles were not engaged in middleman minority businesses. Rather, most Korean merchants were in Koreatown serving co-ethnic customers. In White neighborhoods, they were running majority-oriented businesses. Yoon noted that the proportion of Korean grocery and liquor outlets among all Korean businesses in South Central Los Angeles should not be exaggerated. It was also true that most of the commodities in indoor swap meet malls were imported from Korea and other Asian countries. Therefore, every Korean merchant was not socioeconomically located, to borrow Yoon's phrase in another work, "between white capitalists and low-income African-American customers."<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, May 2, 1986 (English Section); Edward T. Chang, "Korean Swapmeets in Los Angeles: Economic and Racial Implications," *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2004), 58.

<sup>86</sup> In-Jin Yoon, *On My Own: Korean Businesses and Race Relations in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 8, 34; idem, [Review of the book *Caught in the Middle: Korean Merchants in America's Multiethnic Cities*], *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 103, No. 1 (July, 1997), 226.

However, as Kwang Chung Kim suggested, the concept of the dominant group could be expanded to “transcend national boundaries.”<sup>87</sup> Although many goods in indoor swap meet malls were labeled “Made in Korea” or “Made in Taiwan,” the role of the Korean swap meet merchants in South Central Los Angeles was still to distribute the products of large corporations to minority customers in the hardcore ghetto into which corporations, whether American or transnational, did not want to advance. If we broaden the concept of the dominant group in this way, it becomes clear that the majority of Korean-owned stores in South Central Los Angeles could be classified as middleman minority businesses. Moreover, although it is true that Korean-owned grocery and liquor outlets accounted for only about 19% of the total businesses owned by Koreans in South Central Los Angeles in 1991, these typical middleman minority business lines were popularly pursued by Korean immigrants in such a way that a new Korean grocery or liquor outlet reportedly started up every week in Southern California.<sup>88</sup>

Probably, Pyong Gap Min was the most ardent supporter of the application of the middleman minority thesis to understanding Korean American small business entrepreneurs. As the title of his work indicates, he maintained that Korean immigrant merchants were “caught in the middle” between suppliers and minority customers. Unlike Yoon, Min was very flexible in applying the thesis in such a way as to typologize some businesses that did not depend on White suppliers or did not serve minority customers as “semi-middleman” activities.<sup>89</sup> However, it should be noted, Min’s understanding of the role of middleman minorities was structured largely

---

<sup>87</sup> Kwang Chung Kim, “Conclusion,” in Kwang Chung Kim, ed., *Koreans in the Hood: Conflict with African Americans* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 234.

<sup>88</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, June 13, 1991; January 1, 1992.

<sup>89</sup> Pyong Gap Min, *Caught in the Middle: Korean Communities in New York and Los Angeles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 199.

not by a narrative of power relations among suppliers, middlemen, and customers but by a narrative of commodity flow.

In another work co-authored by Andrew Kolodny, Min emphasized that what characterized Korean merchants as middleman minorities was the “intermediary (commercial) role” of the merchants who connected suppliers and customers “in the delivery of goods and services.” The other characteristics of the middleman minorities were as follows: “(1) a concentration in small business, (2) a focus on providing services to minority customers, (3) a dependence on U.S. corporations for supply of merchandise, (4) a strong ethnic cohesion, (5) a subjection to stereotyping, and (6) experiences of hostility from the host society.”<sup>90</sup> Although the relations among suppliers, middlemen, and customers appear to express a simple “delivery” of products based on the equal exchange between commodity and money, it is important to note that they are fundamentally articulated by unequal social relations that have made possible the flow of surplus value. The position of middleman minorities cannot be satisfactorily explained by the intermediary commercial role connecting suppliers and customers in the flow of products because a flow of commodities is not just a “delivery of goods and services” but a flow of exploited surplus value through specific social relations.

Middleman minorities occupy an ambivalent position in such unequal social relations. As Edna Bonacich has emphasized, they are playing a “dual oppressed-oppressor role.” In other words, they are exploited by big corporations as a cheap labor force but at the same time they are exploiting other subordinate customers as agents of the dominant group.<sup>91</sup> Of course, Korean

---

<sup>90</sup> Pyong Gap Min and Andrew Kolodny, “The Middleman Minority Characteristics of Korean Immigrants in the United States,” in Kwang Chung Kim, ed., *Koreans in the Hood: Conflict with African Americans* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 132-133.

<sup>91</sup> Edna Bonacich, “‘Making It’ in America: A Social Evaluation of the Ethics of Immigrant Entrepreneurship,” *Sociological Perspectives*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Oct., 1987), 446.



small business owners in South Central Los Angeles were not directly employed by American corporations and thus appeared to be independent capitalists, but they still served the interests of corporations as an indirect cheap labor force because they were used to penetrate the inner-city market, a poverty-stricken area with a high crime rate, abandoned by large chain supermarkets. The middlemen also covered “ethically marginal business” such as liquor stores on behalf of the liquor industry. Besides, they were willing to provide a cheap labor force to the corporations by working long hours, utilizing unpaid family labor, and employing low-wage co-ethnic or other immigrant workers.<sup>92</sup>

Obviously, these middlemen were not always subject to the dominant group. As Pyong Gap Min rightly highlighted in detail, they sometimes collectively resisted the control of big corporations, landlords, and government agencies to protect their own interests.<sup>93</sup> On the evidence of their collective resistance, Min argued that Korean middleman entrepreneurs were not used by the U.S. corporations. However, it could be argued that such resistance did not contradict the position of oppression that Korean middlemen were occupying in the unequal social relations: rather, it just implied that domination and oppression could never be complete and that resistance could occur in the interstices of domination and oppression even if it was not an automatic occurrence.

Moreover, while most of the surplus from the oppressed was obviously taken by big corporations, Korean middleman minorities were also playing the role of oppressor in the inner-

---

<sup>92</sup> Edna Bonacich, “The Social Costs of Immigrant Entrepreneurship,” *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1988), 120; idem, “‘Making It’ in America: A Social Evaluation of the Ethics of Immigrant Entrepreneurship,” *Sociological Perspectives*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Oct., 1987), 455; Regina Freer, “From Conflict to Convergence: Interracial Relations in the Liquor Store Controversy in South Central Los Angeles,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1999, 44.

<sup>93</sup> Pyong Gap Min, *Caught in the Middle: Korean Communities in New York and Los Angeles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 169-192.

city by appropriating some of the surplus. They were at “the front lines in the oppressive system” and were thus perceived as merchants who were contributing to the exacerbation of the poverty of the inner-city residents by draining their community of resources. It was their role as oppressors that led the local residents to consider them to be an “enemy.”<sup>94</sup> The hostility of Blacks toward Korean immigrant merchants was largely structured by the position of oppressor that Korean merchants occupied in such unequal social relations. In particular, according to David Theo Goldberg, liquor outlets represented “the spirit of surplus value soaked in degradation.” These stores symbolized the inhumane pursuit of profit by merchants without any consideration of the negative effects of alcohol on the community. They even reminded Goldberg of the similitude between South Central Los Angeles and South African apartheid cities: “perpetuating the subjugation of the racially marginalized.”<sup>95</sup>

Even before the Korean immigrants owned the majority of liquor outlets in South Central Los Angeles, these stores already aroused anxiety among Blacks, especially Black churchgoers, with anti-alcohol sentiment. As Denise Herd explained, while Blacks currently tend to regard alcohol as a symbol of “sociability and pleasure,” they have also retained the tradition of abstinence since the antebellum temperance movement. They pursued “social acceptance” by supporting the temperance movement. Alcohol has been perceived as “a symbol of slavery and oppression.”<sup>96</sup> Not surprisingly, therefore, the prevalence of liquor outlets in South Central Los

---

<sup>94</sup> Edna Bonacich, “‘Making It’ in America: A Social Evaluation of the Ethics of Immigrant Entrepreneurship,” *Sociological Perspectives*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Oct., 1987), 461; idem, “The Other Side of Ethnic Entrepreneurship: A Dialogue with Waldinger, Aldrich, Ward and Associates,” *International Migration Review*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Autumn, 1993), 689-690; idem, “Thoughts on Urban Unrest,” in Fred L. Pincus and Howard J. Ehrlich, eds., *Race and Ethnic Conflict: Contending Views on Prejudice, Discrimination, and Ethnoviolence* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 406.

<sup>95</sup> David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1993), 202.

<sup>96</sup> Denise Herd, “Ambiguity in Black Drinking Norms: An Ethnohistorical Interpretation,” in Linda A. Bennett and Genevieve M. Ames, eds., *The American Experience with Alcohol: Contrasting Cultural Perspectives* (New York:

Angeles stimulated Black Americans' temperance imagination, in which alcohol is regarded as a symbol of oppression. Liquor outlets were denounced as "by far a [sic] most serious *debilitating and devastating force*" in South Central Los Angeles. They were blamed for fomenting "a parasite relationship" and "a form of enslavement." A liquor store and its premises were also considered a place for loiterers, alcoholics, drug dealers and users, and criminals.<sup>97</sup> To respond to these problems caused by the over-concentration of liquor outlets in the Black community, twenty-two local churches formed the South Central Organizing Committee (SCOC) in 1983. By imposing rigorous requirements on the establishment of a new liquor store, the SCOC succeeded in limiting the number of liquor stores in South Central Los Angeles.<sup>98</sup>

Understandably, the conspicuous transfer of ownership of liquor outlets to Korean immigrants in the mid-1980s rendered these stores more controversial and volatile by adding a new dimension to the anti-alcohol sentiment. It fanned the flames of anti-immigrant sentiment. Korean-owned liquor stores increasingly became a place where anti-liquor store sentiment converged with anti-immigrant sentiment in the Black community. Such convergence reinforced the belief that non-Blacks enslaved Black people and inhumanly squeezed profit out of them by

---

Plenum, 1985), 149-170.

<sup>97</sup> Senate Committee on Governmental Organization, *Transcript of Proceedings: Interim Hearing on Over-Concentration of Liquor Licenses in Los Angeles County*, Carson Community Center, City of Carson, Los Angeles County, October 13, 1983 (Sacramento, California: Senate Committee on Governmental Organization, 1983), 2, 143-144, and 164-166. See also Karen Bass, "Appendix E: The Campaign to Rebuild South Central Los Angeles without Liquor Stores," in Prakash L. Grover, ed., *Preventing Problems Related to Alcohol Availability: Environmental Approaches – Reference Guide* (Rockville, Maryland: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, 1999), 152; Los Angeles County Office of Alcohol Programs, *1986-87 Los Angeles County Plan for Alcohol-Related Services* (Los Angeles: Department of Health Services, 1986), 271.

<sup>98</sup> James F. Mosher and Rose M. Works, *Confronting Sacramento: State Preemption, Community Control, and Alcohol-Outlet Blight in Two Inner-City Communities* (San Rafael, California: Marin Institute for the Prevention of Alcohol and Other Drug Problems, 1994), 17; Raphael J. Sonenshein, "The Battle over Liquor Stores in South Central Los Angeles: The Management of an Interminority Conflict," *Urban Affairs Review*, Vol. 31, No. 6 (1996), 719; Kyeyoung Park, "Confronting the Liquor Industry in Los Angeles," *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, Vol. 24, No. 7/8 (2004), 115.

selling alcohol. As shown in a mural created by Mike Alewitz, a prominent American labor muralist who was strongly influenced by Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, this sentiment rendered the Korean national flag and liquor bottle symbols denoting exploitation and oppression.

Figure 2: Mike Alewitz's "Labor Solidarity Has No Borders" (1990)  
(Photograph by author, September 19, 2008)



This mural was painted on the north wall of the Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research in South Central Los Angeles. A bloodsucking serpent on the right of the center of the mural protects "the captains of local industry (grapes, wine, garment, pharmaceutical, machine tools, aeronautics, shipbuilding)" holding flags in its hands. The Korean national flag is painted on the left side of a liquor bottle. See Paul Buhle and Mike Alewitz, *Insurgent Images: The Agitprop Murals of Mike Alewitz* (New York: Monthly Review, 2002), 60-63.

Nevertheless, Min's narrative of Korean middleman minorities did not consider their role of oppressor in urban ghettos. When he defined Korean immigrant merchants as middleman minorities, he did not see the power relations behind the flow of commodities. Instead, his explanation of Korean middlemen repeated a familiar narrative that various disadvantages caused Korean immigrants to take the intermediary commercial role between suppliers and customers in inner-cities. Because he did not take into consideration the power relations, especially between Korean middlemen and minority customers, he did not try to explain the reason for the hostility of minority customers toward Korean merchants in terms of oppression. Instead, he just introduced another familiar story of scapegoating to explicate the hostility. According to this story, Blacks who experienced frustration in economic mobility tended to blame and scapegoat Korean middlemen not because they were playing a role of oppressor but because they lacked "linguistic fluency and political power" and thus were not able to "retaliate effectively."<sup>99</sup>

Min's explanation of middleman minorities was widely introduced among Korean immigrants. When there were several Black boycotts of Korean-owned stores in South Central Los Angeles in the late 1980s, the *Hankook Ilbo* published his brief paper, which was presented at a conference held by an association of Korean American professors in Los Angeles. Min's main argument was that Korean merchants were occupying a position of "buffer" between the dominant group and subordinate groups, the dominant group tended to scapegoat the middlemen minority group in socioeconomic crisis, and the oppressed were inclined to direct their frustration over the lack of economic opportunities toward the middlemen. He noted that the middlemen group was falsely accused of being "parasites" that were exploiting people.

---

<sup>99</sup> Pyong Gap Min, *Caught in the Middle: Korean Communities in New York and Los Angeles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 22.

Introducing Min's academic profile and the context of his work, the article in the Korean ethnic newspaper even added that Koreans, often called a diligent and hardworking ethnic group or Asian Jews in America, became a target of jealousy in minority communities.<sup>100</sup> In this way, the relation of oppression was replaced by the relation of jealousy. Hostility of subordinate customers toward middleman minorities was framed as an outburst of frustration that had nothing to do with the oppressor role of Korean merchants. Relieved from any responsibility for the system of exploitation, Korean merchants were thus portrayed as an innocent buffer group who experienced dual scapegoating from the host society: one from the dominant group and the other from subordinate groups.

#### Exemplary city for racial harmony?

It is very clear that not all Korean middleman merchants experienced hostility from their minority customers. It is true that too much attention has been paid to the tension between Korean merchants and their customers. As Jennifer Lee insisted, everyday interactions between the two groups could be defined as "positive, civil, and routine." Conflict could be viewed as a temporary breakdown of everyday social order that was characterized by "ordinariness."<sup>101</sup> It is

---

<sup>100</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, December 27, 1989. The role of middleman minorities as a "buffer" between the dominant and subordinate groups was not invented by Pyong Gap Min. It was initially used by Hubert M. Blalock who originally presented the middleman minority thesis. Blalock defined a middleman minority as a distinct ethnic group who functioned not only as a bridge but also as a buffer between the dominant elite and the masses of peasants in pre-modern societies. See Hubert M. Blalock, Jr., *Toward a Theory of Minority-Group Relations* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1967), 80. Meanwhile, Edna Bonacich also frequently used the term "buffer" to describe the in-between position of middleman minorities. She also often mentioned that the dominant group could disown and scapegoat the middleman minorities, who also could be scapegoated by subordinate groups for the oppressive system. In this way, she left open the possibility that the middleman minority thesis could be easily conflated with a scapegoating story.

<sup>101</sup> Jennifer Lee, *Civility in the City: Blacks, Jews, and Koreans in Urban America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 6, 182.

not difficult to find examples of such ordinariness in the everyday life of urban inner-cities. In South Central Los Angeles, Chung Lee was probably an exemplary Korean merchant who made a tireless effort to establish civility with his minority customers. He immigrated to this country in 1974 and had worked at his brother's gas station in South Central Los Angeles for half a year before starting a market with his savings and a loan from his brother. Chung Lee was very kind to his neighbors and customers in such a way that he was called "Homeboy" or "Brother Lee" by neighborhood teenagers and customers. He had been frequently cited even as a model of racial harmony in the mainstream media as well as in Korean ethnic newspapers. "We all love him... There isn't one bad thing you can say about Lee," said one neighbor, recalling that Lee had attended his father's funeral.<sup>102</sup>

As Sung Hak Choi pointed out, however, Korean middlemen's effort to build civil and routine relations with customers could be the outcome of their previous experiences of conflict with local residents. What forced Korean merchants to maintain civil and ordinary relations with their minority customers in the first place could be "the looming threat" of protest or violence. In this case, civility was a conflict management strategy employed by store owners. While Jennifer Lee thought crime and violence were not ordinary aspects of the everyday life in inner-cities, even infrequent accidents could arouse fear of the possibility of becoming victims among Korean small business owners.<sup>103</sup> Even the respected merchant Chung Lee made it a business principle to thoroughly watch his customers. When a stranger, especially an unfamiliar young customer, came into the store, he advised Korean immigrant merchants to "be sure to watch out him/her. Don't try to crowd into one spot. Spread out. And give him/her a hint that you assumed a posture

---

<sup>102</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, April 15, 1985; *Koreatown*, January, 1983.

<sup>103</sup> Sung Hak Choi, "'Trouble City': Korean-Black Conflict in Inner City Los Angeles: 1994-2003," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2003, xi-xii.



of impregnable defense without hurting his/her feelings.”<sup>104</sup>

As early as 1979, as if reflecting Korean merchants’ fear of violence, the notion of Black armed robbery began to take hold in the Los Angeles Korean American community. Published in the *Hankook Ilbo* in 1979, Sae Bang Lee’s short novel titled *Önŭ Öulchökhan Yörŭm* [*A Gloomy Summer*] spoke of the fear and agony of a Korean immigrant merchant who killed a Black robber in his liquor store.<sup>105</sup> Just one day before the publication of Sae Bang Lee’s novel, Korean community leaders also met Ted Watkins, chairman of the Watts Labor Community Action Committee, to “officially” sign an agreement of cooperation. By signing the “friendship accord,” Koreans and Blacks agreed to promote an exchange of human and material resources.<sup>106</sup> Although this agreement was reported without a detailed context in which it took place, it was initially prepared by Han Mo Koo, president of the Korean Association of Southern California, and his staff to “improve relations with other minorities in the city.” A Korean magazine in English also expected this agreement would be the “beginning of beautiful partnership.”<sup>107</sup>

However, it should be noted that it appears that the hostilities of Blacks that Korean immigrants experienced were less publicized and less organized in Los Angeles than in other big cities, at least until late in the summer of 1983. In Philadelphia, for instance, Korean merchants were overtly criticized by Black leaders in 1977. In particular, according to Illsoo Kim, the biweekly Black newspaper *Tribune* put the issue in the public space for opinion. A well-known

---

<sup>104</sup> Anonymous, “Oesang Sonnimŭn P’ihara: Ch’arari Uyrŭl Sasö Chunŭn P’yöni Natda [Don’t Deal with Credit Demanding Customers: It Would Be Better to Buy Milk and Give It to Them],” *Ppuri* [*The Korean Roots*], No. 15 (1983), 122.

<sup>105</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, November 8, 1979.

<sup>106</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, November 7 and 8, 1979; *Hankook Ilbo*, November 19, 1979 (English Section); *Koreatown*, November 12, 1979.

<sup>107</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, November 19, 1979 (English Section); *Koreatown*, November 12, 1979.

Black leader sent an open letter condemning Korean merchants to a West Philadelphia Congressman.<sup>108</sup> Although the proportion of Korean-owned stores among all businesses was also on the rise in South Central Los Angeles, their presence did not become publicly denounced by Black leaders. This led most Korean American journalists and scholars to optimistically believe that race relations in Los Angeles were better than in other cities.

For example, in 1978 when a conference celebrating the 75th anniversary of Korean immigration was held in Los Angeles, a variety of issues about Korean immigrants were discussed, but race relations hardly attracted the attention of the presenters and discussants. Only Sun Joo Lee, then a board member of the Association for Korean Studies, casually threw in a few comments about the tension in Philadelphia. Ironically, however, the tension was misconstrued by him as just evidence of the economic success of Korean immigrants.<sup>109</sup> This situation did not alert Korean American scholars to the possibility that Korean immigrants could be involved in racial conflicts in Los Angeles in the future.

In 1983, *Koreatown* also devoted a front page and another whole page to describing race relations of Korean immigrants with Blacks in Los Angeles, New York, and Baltimore. According to the article, titled “The Tale of Three Cities Unfolds,” Korean mom-and-pop stores sprang up through the Black neighborhood of Baltimore. As Korean merchants in Baltimore encountered local opposition, two Korean civic and merchant associations in Baltimore finally joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in June of 1982 to build an alliance between Blacks and Korean immigrants. The story of New York was more

---

<sup>108</sup> Illsoo Kim, *New Urban Immigrants: The Korean Community in New York* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 257.

<sup>109</sup> The Association for Korean Studies, *Migukanü Hanin K‘ömyunit‘i: Hyönhwangkwa Mirae [Korean Communities in America: Present Conditions and Future]* (Los Angeles: Korean Pioneer Press, 1978), 99-100.

conspicuous for the confrontational themes emerged from a Black boycott of Korean-owned stores in Harlem. While the article did not neglect to emphasize that there was a split among Blacks over the boycott of Korean businesses along 125th Street in Harlem, it conveyed that there were critical conflicts between the Korean and Black communities. Compared with these two cities, Los Angeles was depicted as an exemplary area for racial harmony. Its narrative was structured by the story of the respected Korean merchant Chung Lee. In this narrative, racial harmony rather than racial conflict prevailed between Korean merchants and Black residents. The image of Korean merchants transmitted through the person of Chung Lee was that they treated Black neighbors and customers as if they were part of their race or family.<sup>110</sup>

Contrary to the evaluation of most Korean journalists and scholars, however, race relations in Los Angeles were not much better than in other cities. At the grassroots level, race relations in Los Angeles were steadily worsening because of the rapid demographic change and devastating urban restructuring. Blacks felt under siege from these drastic processes of transformation. Although Korean merchants made various efforts to maintain civil relations with Black customers, their socioeconomic position was still as ghetto merchants who occupied the front lines of an exploitative system. It would be thus somewhat unrealistic to expect the absence of conflicts between the beleaguered people by the oppressive system and the commercial agents for that system.

What led Korean journalists and scholars to portray race relations with Blacks in Los Angeles optimistically was the absence of boycotts. But this absence would not guarantee conflict-free relations or civility between the two groups. Instead, tension was just accumulating at the grassroots level without being publicly expressed or collectively organized, mainly due to

---

<sup>110</sup> *Koreatown*, January, 1983.

the political structure of Los Angeles. As Patrick D. Joyce explained, Los Angeles had a strong legacy of reform politics, such that there was a paucity of community-based organizations, while New York City has retained the tradition of machine politics as a device for community organizing. It was such a scarcity of community organizations that made it difficult for the grassroots tension between Korean merchants and Black customers in Los Angeles to be publicly articulated. In other words, although the tension was accruing in Los Angeles, there were few organizations to identify it and channel it into collective protests such as a boycott, while the tradition of machine politics in New York City made it possible for the grassroots tension to be organized and channeled into sometimes long and loud collective actions.<sup>111</sup>

---

<sup>111</sup> Patrick D. Joyce, *No Fire Next Time: Black-Korean Conflicts and the Future of America's Cities* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 7, 53-64, 169.

## Chapter Two

### The Language of Black-Korean Conflict

Post-1965 immigrants to the United States, Korean merchants were positioned as a “middleman minority” group in Los Angeles’ Black community. Although they were not formally employed by large American corporations as paid workers, they played the role of indirect cheap labor for the corporations by bearing the cost of penetrating inner-city markets through working extremely long hours, utilizing unpaid family labor, particularly the labor of wives and children, and employing low-wage co-ethnic or other immigrant workers.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, however, they also sought to profit through what amounted to the systematic exploitation of poor people of color living in economically struggling neighborhoods. Unlike a faceless corporation, Korean merchants engaged in daily, visible practices that suggested they occupied the role of an oppressor. As such, they were perceived as outsiders contributing to the exacerbation of poverty in the Black community. Tension between Blacks and Koreans began to accumulate at the grassroots level and eventually expressed itself as public discontent in the early 1980s. This chapter examines the discursive realm that provided Blacks and Koreans with multiple subject positions from which they could make sense of the tension. Within these discursive fields, Blacks and Koreans assigned various meanings to the building tension between the two groups. Processes of signification led Blacks and Koreans to accept a particular narrative specifying cause and effect of the tension, and in turn led both groups to behave in ways promoted by this narrative.

---

<sup>1</sup> Edna Bonacich, “The Social Costs of Immigrant Entrepreneurship,” *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1988), 120; idem, “‘Making It’ in America: A Social Evaluation of the Ethics of Immigrant Entrepreneurship,” *Sociological Perspectives*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Oct., 1987), 455; Regina Freer, “From Conflict to Convergence: Interracial Relations in the Liquor Store Controversy in South Central Los Angeles,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1999, 44.

At least until the late 1960s, the Black community in Los Angeles was a hotbed for the American political left, complete with a powerful progressive political imagination that strongly advocated for multiracial activism and direct confrontation with the racist state. Partly in response to the brutal suppression of the Black left by the Los Angeles Police Department, this progressive imagination was replaced in many sectors by the discursive pull of Black nationalism and its emphasis on seeking community control. While the former framework insisted on the importance of structural discrimination as negatively impacting Black economic underdevelopment, in Los Angeles at least, Black nationalism's emphasis on local control led some to locate the reason for Black poverty in the business activity of "outside" merchants. Within the languages of community control, Korean merchants were positioned as those responsible for the limited development of the Black community. Didactic logic demanded that these merchants be opposed for the well-being of the Black community. Consistent with so many places where Asian immigrants settled, Korean immigrants were also "orientalized," portrayed as unreasonable and unscrupulous. Through this Black orientalism, the Black community discursively constituted Black rational, logical, and conscionable subjects. Furthermore, through the languages of Black nativism, the Black community discursively produced a bipolar framework where Blacks were U.S. national subjects while Korean merchants were deemed as perpetual foreigners incapable of national assimilation.

In response to this Black hostility, Korean immigrants also deployed multiple languages. Emphasizing the relevance of cultural and communication barriers, they sought to frame Black-Korean conflict as an issue that could be managed through various programs for mutual understanding and better communication. In arguing that Black-Korean conflict was manufactured by the mainstream media to pit Blacks and Koreans against each other, Korean immigrants also tried to locate the conflicts within a broader social structure that implicated

mainstream White America. In addition, Korean immigrants sought to frame everyday conflicts between Koreans and Blacks in their stores through insistence that such tension was inherent in any transaction between merchants and customers. Korean immigrants drew upon their own binary framework, positioning themselves as a hardworking model minority while blaming Black poverty on alleged cultural deficiencies. As such, Korean immigrants ultimately accepted the dominant racial ideology of the United States. By paying attention to these various discursive practices through which Korean immigrants articulated their experience of hostility from the Black community, I argue in this chapter that Korean immigrants were not apolitical bystanders to historical events, but instead, active agents who sought desperately to protect their interests even as they often reinforced a dominant discourse about race in America.

### Smoldering

While Black discontent against the presence of Korean merchants remained unorganized in Los Angeles because there were few community-based organizations to mobilize and sustain it into collective action, it erupted at times into violence of the worst kind. Even when *Koreatown* optimistically assessed the race relations with Blacks in Los Angeles, the tension between Blacks and Koreans had already burst out into a few tragic violent events. In 1982, a Korean shopkeeper was murdered by a robber in his store not far from a store owned by Chung Lee who had maintained good relations with his neighbors and customers. The next year, a Korean couple, Ki Poong Ham and Bok Soo Ham, were also shot to death in their grocery store.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, just three months after the optimistic coverage of race relations between

---

<sup>2</sup> *Koreatown*, January, 1983.

Blacks and Koreans that appeared in *Koreatown* in January 1983, the first publicly noticeable smoke of the Black-Korean conflicts rose up at a public hearing held in Inglewood City Hall by the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations. At the hearing, one of the five hearings held by the commission to assess the “human relations climate” of Los Angeles County, the hostility toward Korean and Vietnamese merchants in South Central Los Angeles was expressed by the group Black Agenda which was founded in 1979 by Thomas Kilgore, Jr., Maulana Ron Karenga, and other Black leaders to improve the image of Black people, to promote Black business, and to build a connection with the Black people of the African continent.<sup>3</sup> The Black Agenda gave voice to the discontent that existed among Blacks concerning issues such as the rapid transfer of ownership of gas stations and mom-and-pop stores to these outside merchants; the disproportionate presence of Asian employees in Asian-owned stores; the lack of English language fluency of the Asian merchants and the failure of communication between the merchants and local customers; and the “apparent rudeness of some toward Black patrons.” While defending Korean merchants against their critics, an association of Korean grocery and liquor retailers explained that they were not only unaccustomed to American customs and culture but also often lacked knowledge of the “American way of doing business” because many of them were fresh off the boat. The association added that Korean merchants’ lack of English language fluency could be the reason for communication failures and “unintentional misunderstandings.”<sup>4</sup> Presenters at the hearing seemed to agree that lack of communication was the principal cause of problems that occurred between Korean merchants

---

<sup>3</sup> On the major thrusts of the Black Agenda, see UCLA Oral History Program, *Black Leadership in Los Angeles Oral History Transcript: Thomas Kilgore, Jr.*, Interviewed by Robin D. G. Kelley, 1988, 224, Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Library, UCLA, Retrieved May 6, 2011 from the Online Archive of California.

<sup>4</sup> Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations, *Today's Conflicts, Tomorrow's Challenges: A Report on Five State of the County Hearings* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations, 1984), 8.



and Black customers. They thus recommended that the county commission increase a dialogue between the Black Agenda and Korean merchants as a means to solve communication problems.<sup>5</sup>

The Los Angeles City Human Relations Commission also considered dialogue an important strategy for resolving the dispute between the two communities. In June 1983, the city commission arranged the first luncheon meeting of civic leaders from both communities in Koreatown. One month after the first meeting, the city commission again held a City Hall luncheon meeting in which about thirty leaders from the two communities agreed to build a “permanent organization for better promotion of mutual understanding and cooperation.” Although some Black participants recommended that Korean merchants make more contributions to the development of the Black community in which they were doing business, Korean leaders at the meeting addressed the problems between the two communities more optimistically. For instance, Sonia Suk, a well-known Korean American real estate businesswoman and a city human relations commissioner appointed by Bradley in 1976, anticipated the meeting as a moment signaling the end of conflict and the beginning of “unity and cooperation.”<sup>6</sup>

#### James H. Cleaver and the articulation of Asian “crisis”

Much to Sonia Suk’s disappointment, however, the tension did not abate at all. Instead, it became more widely publicized by James H. Cleaver, a veteran Black journalist, two weeks after the second meeting arranged by the city commission. Cleaver was then the executive editor

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>6</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, August 2, 1983 (English Section).

of the Black-owned weekly newspaper *Los Angeles Sentinel* and had attended the April county hearing in Inglewood City Hall with other Black leaders including Mark Ridley-Thomas, who then served as executive director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference of Los Angeles. Cleaver's four-part series, published from August 11 to September 1, 1983, addressed a variety of topics ranging from the discriminatory practices of federal lending institutions and rapid transfer of small business ownership to Asian merchants to an effort of the city government to improve relations between Black customers and Asian merchants. To borrow terms from Roman Jakobson, however, the "dominant" theme which functioned as a "focusing component" in Cleaver's series was a story about how disrespectfully Black customers were treated by the merchants.<sup>7</sup>

Cleaver began his series by saying that a number of Black businesses were taken over by Asians in a short span of time. However, he cautioned that the "essential anger" should not be directed at the Asian merchants. Although he referred to some comments made by Black leaders that Blacks did not want to run small businesses because of their meager profits and that they tried to leave the community because of its high crime rate, Cleaver insisted that discriminatory lending practices of financial institutions should be blamed for hampering the development of Black business. To support his argument, he cited an instance in which one Black liquor store owner was charged an interest rate of more than 20% on a federally financed loan while an Asian liquor store owner was charged only a 3% rate on the same loan. To substantiate his argument from a rather different angle, Cleaver attracted the reader's attention to a transfer of control of the Bank of Finance, which had once been in the hands of Blacks and was renamed the West Olympia Bank after falling under the control of Koreans. Cleaver accused the Koreans of being

---

<sup>7</sup> On the concept of the "dominant" theme, see Roman Jakobson, *Language in Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 41.

given “a decided edge” by the bank in such a way that it provided them with “extra added financial push.”<sup>8</sup>

Considering the role of the Bank of Finance in the Black community, it was understandable that he expressed his discontent with the takeover of the bank by Koreans. The Bank of Finance was established in 1964 by five affluent Blacks including Tom Bradley, then a councilman of the 10th City Council district. The Bank of Finance was the only Black-owned bank in Los Angeles County. With \$31 million in deposit, the bank was one of the smallest banks in the county. However, according to a study of mortgage loans made in West Adams where Blacks accounted for 71% of the total residents, the Bank of Finance played a significant role in the neighborhood by offering six mortgage loans to the residents in 1976. In comparison, the Bank of America, which was the largest bank in the United States, with \$60 billion in deposit and fourteen branches in and around West Adams, made only ten mortgage loans in the same year; Crocker Bank, the thirteenth largest bank in the nation in the late 1970s, provided two loans throughout 1976; Wells Fargo Bank with \$10 billion in deposit made just one mortgage loan in the area. In spite of its small amount on deposit, the Bank of Finance was playing a more positive role than mainstream banks in the Black community.<sup>9</sup>

As the Bank of Finance began to suffer management problems in the late 1970s, however, a few Korean businessmen led by food retailer Karl Hak Chun successfully took control of the bank by investing \$1.2 million in 1980. After the transfer of control of the bank, the racial composition of its board members also dramatically changed in such a way that there remained only one Black board member, Gilbert Lindsay, then a councilman of the 9th City

---

<sup>8</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, August 11 and August 18, 1983.

<sup>9</sup> Ron Finney, Greg Jackson, and Sheridan Sonne, *Redlining Revealed: Where to Bank to Save Your Neighborhood* (Los Angeles: The Center for New Corporate Priorities, 1977), 2, 12-19.

Council district, among fourteen board members. The rest of the thirteen board positions were taken by Koreans. Renamed the West Olympia Bank in 1982, the bank had opened a Western Avenue branch in Koreatown and made an effort to give out “healthier and larger loans to Koreans” until it was eventually sold off to the Wilshire State Bank, another Korean ethnic bank in Los Angeles, in 1984.<sup>10</sup> A casual conversation with a veteran Korean American journalist named Kil-Nam Roh in 2009 also verified that the case of the Bank of Finance was taken seriously by the Black community. He still remembered a comment made by one Black female journalist that the transfer of control of the bank stirred up anger as well as concern among Blacks.

It should be noted, however, that Cleaver’s discontent was conspicuous by the relative absence of analysis of discriminatory lending practices of mainstream commercial banks. As revealed in the mortgage loans made in West Adams, it was the large commercial banks that were the most restrictive in providing minorities with financial support. As some economists argued, it was also the big commercial banks that contributed to a marked difference in debt capital: the business loans of commercial banks accounted for 20% of the start-up debt capital of non-minority businesses while they represented only 13% of start-up debt capital of Black-owned businesses in 1982. Such a lack of access to capital, according to John W. Mack, president of Los Angeles Urban League, was “one of the most pressing problems” to prevent the development of Black business. Even the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977, which was designed to reduce the redlining of commercial banks had been ineffective in encouraging banks to increase their lending in the inner-city.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> *Koreatown*, May 17, 1982; *Koreatown*, April-June, 1982.

<sup>11</sup> Gavin M. Chen and John A. Cole, “The Myths, Facts, and Theories of Ethnic, Small-Scale Enterprise Financing,” *Review of Black Political Economy*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Spring, 1988), 119; U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, *The State of Urban America: Hearing before the Committee on Banking,*

Despite Cleaver's assertion that the "essential anger" should be directed at the banking system, it is obvious that such discriminatory practices of large commercial banks failed to catch his attention. Instead of analyzing the discriminatory lending practices, he provided rather a plethora of rhetoric about Asian "attitudes," the Asian "problem," and Asian "crisis." Despite his emphasis that the Asian merchants were not the target of "essential anger," Cleaver's story abounded with accusations of the merchants' mistreatment of Black customers. As a result, the lending discrimination of banks, in spite of the fact that he claimed it to be his main target, was inverted into a secondary component to explain what he seemed to conceive of as the principal component: the massive influx of Asian merchants and their disrespectful treatment of Black customers. This is why the "dominant" theme of his story was not the discriminatory lending practices of banks but the disrespectful attitudes of the Asian merchants.

Cleaver's accusations of Asian merchants were a repetition of the concerns that were raised by the Black Agenda four months earlier at the Inglewood City Hall hearing that he himself had attended: the unwillingness of Asian merchants to employ Black residents; Asian merchants' poor command of English and the lack of communication between the merchants and Black customers; and the disrespectful treatment of Black customers by the merchants. To the concerns, however, Cleaver added that the Asian merchants were preferred over Black potential buyers by the existing store owners and that the Asian employers preferred Hispanic employees to Black workers. In addition, he compared the services of Asian merchants with those of White merchants. While the services of White merchants were described as "kind," "courteous," "warm," and "friendly," the Asian merchants were considered to provide "cold," "distant," and "disrespectful" treatment to the local customers. The services of Asian merchants were portrayed

---

*Housing, and Urban Affairs*, 103rd Congress, 1st Session (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1993), 80.

as shabby, indifferent, insulting, and even verbally abusive. In Cleaver's story, the Asian merchants were also blamed by Black customers for charging "usurious" prices, but at the same time they were severely criticized by Black merchants for "systematically" undercutting prices.<sup>12</sup>

Of course, Cleaver was not inexperienced enough to refer to a specific Asian ethnic group as being responsible for the Asian "crisis." Koreans were mentioned only once in his series when he discussed the Bank of Finance. However, it was not difficult to surmise which ethnic group he had in mind while he was writing his accusatory articles. Neither was Cleaver unsophisticated enough to instigate any form of violent action as a solution to the Asian "problem." Instead, in the third article that appeared on August 25, he introduced an opinion of a female reader who recommended a silent boycott without picketing the problematic merchants, a recommendation not to buy anything from the merchants. In the final part of the series, Cleaver also reminded the reader of a slogan of Leon H. Washington, Jr. who founded the *Los Angeles Sentinel* in 1933: "Don't spend your money where you can't work."<sup>13</sup>

Cleaver's series was followed by Lee Ivory's article warning that the Asian merchants could face lawsuits. In this article, which appeared one week after Cleaver's series, the Asian merchants were blamed for their "often-irrational acts" and were criticized of their "forceful and illogical behavior." They were more often than not "unconscionable" and were largely unreceptive to "rational conversation." "If one of them [Asian merchants] ever puts his or her hands on me," said Ivory's interviewee, almost angrily. "[T]hey'd better be prepared for another version of the Vietnam war." An editorial of the newspaper, published on the same day that Ivory's article appeared, lowered the tone of critique of the Asian merchants by scolding a young

---

<sup>12</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, August 11, August 18, and August 25, 1983.

<sup>13</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, August 25 and September 1, 1983.

Black woman who violently exploded in anger toward a merchant with little proficiency in English. Like Cleaver, however, the editorial reminded the reader of the catchword of Leon H. Washington, Jr. and suggested a collective action like the Montgomery bus boycott as a practicable solution to the Asian troubles.<sup>14</sup>

The *Los Angeles Sentinel* seemed to succeed in evoking sympathetic responses from the reader. According to Cleaver, the readers had showed more favorable support for his series than any other article in the past ten years.<sup>15</sup> A pastor sent an encouraging letter that his church would be supportive of any effort to prevent the disrespectful practices of the Asian merchants. A Black female reader insisted in her letter sent to the newspaper that the lending preference for Asians was an “injustice” because “Blacks helped build this nation.” She also endorsed a silent boycott of the Asian stores while blaming Asian merchants for not contributing to the Black community and for not paying Black employees reasonable wages.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Black community organizations responded to the articles of the newspaper by launching campaigns against the Asian businesses. In early September 1983, the local branch of the NAACP sponsored a “Black Dollar Days” campaign. During the five day campaign, Black people were urged to spend \$2 bills or Susan B. Anthony dollar coins at the Asian stores in order to show the buying power of the Black community to the merchants.<sup>17</sup> A more aggressive campaign, “Buy Black Hire Black,” was also initiated by the Black Agenda, which had already begun to raise money for repurchasing some of the businesses owned by the outside merchants to inform Blacks that their

---

<sup>14</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, September 8, 1983.

<sup>15</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October, 20, 1983.

<sup>16</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, September 22, 1983.

<sup>17</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, August 18, 1983.

economic development would be dependent on recycling Black dollars, patronizing Black businesses, and hiring Black people.<sup>18</sup>

### Withering of progressive political imagination

The Black discontent with the presence of Korean merchants was structured by languages of community control espoused by Black nationalists. To say this in the manner of Ferdinand de Saussure, the languages of community control constituted the Black experiences with the Korean merchants. Experience, as British historian Gareth Stedman Jones has maintained, cannot be abstracted from language, which not only organizes the understanding of experience but also structures the articulation of experience.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, discursive formations constituted the “social, cultural, and political environment in which people acted and thought” by structuring fundamental categories of understanding.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, it was discursive fields that constituted the social world in which Black people made sense of their experiences with the Korean merchants. It was a process of signification within the discursive fields that led them to believe a certain cause and effect story and to behave in a specific way.

The languages of Black nationalism were more influential than any other discourse. These languages enabled Blacks to imagine themselves as agents in the social world and to

---

<sup>18</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October 6, 1983.

<sup>19</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 20. 101. Historians, especially social historians, according to Jones, have retained a “romantic conception of language” by presuming that experience is cumulatively resulted in a collective consciousness and that it is expressed through a simple medium of language. See *Languages of Class*, 20.

<sup>20</sup> Geoff Eley, “Is All the World a Text? From Social History to the History of Society Two Decades Later,” in Terrence J. McDonald, ed., *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), 222.



interpret their relationships with other groups. However, it was at the expense of languages of multiracial activism and direct confrontation with the state that Black nationalism emerged and consolidated itself in the Los Angeles Black community. In saying this, I do not mean to deny the fact that Black nationalism has countered racism in many ways. Although there have been various Black nationalist organizations and political visions, as Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. pointed out, almost all of them projected “a politics of transvaluation,” which reassessed Blacks as a self-determining people.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, however, it is also undeniably true that a history of their rise to power in the Los Angeles Black community has been a history of the demise of the left and progressive political imagination.

As Gerald Horne explained, Los Angeles had relatively strong left and progressive movements based in the working class and the Black community. The tie between Blacks and progressives was strengthened by World War II, which not only brought about a massive Black migration from the South to Los Angeles but also spurred the proletarianization of their workforce. The Civil Rights Congress, founded in 1946, provided people with the languages of multiracial activism “to join together across racial lines to combat” racism and police brutality. Due to the Red Scare and FBI spying, however, it was completely destroyed by 1965.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, after the Watts riots of 1965, South Central Los Angeles and West Oakland produced two major streams of Black nationalism, which aroused color consciousness throughout the nation. Maulana Ron Karenga established the United Slaves, a cultural nationalist organization, in South Central Los Angeles, while Huey Newton and Bobby Seale founded the Black Panther

---

<sup>21</sup> Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., “Introduction: Black Power Revisited,” in Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., ed., *Is It Nation Time? Contemporary Essays on Black Power and Black Nationalism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 4.

<sup>22</sup> Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), 3-10, 122.

Party (BPP), a revolutionary nationalist organization, in West Oakland in 1966.<sup>23</sup> The BPP Southern California chapter was also established in 1967 by Alprentice “Bunchy” Carter.<sup>24</sup> According to Horne, the BPP had ties with the weakened left and was influenced by the Civil Rights Congress and its emphasis on direct confrontation with the state. The BPP was also an internationalism-oriented Black nationalist group which advocated building alliances with revolutionary governments abroad.<sup>25</sup>

Due to brutal political repression, however, the BPP and revolutionaries had eventually disappeared and with it the languages of direct confrontation with the state. Deprived of the progressive political imagination through multiracial activism and direct confrontation with the state, the Black community became a fertile ground for the growth of depoliticized languages of the Black cultural nationalists. Unlike left and progressive groups, they were considered less threatening and were thus accommodated by the state. They sought the assertion of Black cultural identity by emphasizing Blackness based on African-sounding naming or African-looking clothing without crossing racial lines to enhance multiracial activism. Furthermore, they pursued the development of Black business by controlling businesses within their community without raising a threat to the structure of domination primarily responsible for the underdevelopment of Black business. An economic creed of the Black cultural nationalists was that businesses in the Black community should be controlled by Black people to benefit from the multiplier effect of Black dollars. Black consumer spending at Black stores was believed to be

---

<sup>23</sup> Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 303-304.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Schiesl, “Behind the Shield: Social Discontent and the Los Angeles Police since 1950,” in Martin Schiesl and Mark M. Dodge, eds., *City of Promise: Race and Historical Change in Los Angeles* (Claremont, Calif.: Regina Books, 2006), 148.

<sup>25</sup> Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), 13, 18, 187.

recycled for the benefit of Black community, but their spending at stores owned by other ethnic merchants was considered to be drained out of their community.<sup>26</sup>

### Black discontent with Korean merchants

It was the languages of community control that structured and articulated the Black experiences with Korean merchants in South Central Los Angeles. These languages defined Korean merchants, according to Ivan Light and others, as “the latest of a succession of external merchants” who eventually retarded the development of the Black community by draining Black dollars out of their community. Korean merchants were considered responsible for the negative multiplier effect of Black dollars.<sup>27</sup> Such languages structured the complaints from the reader of the *Los Angeles Sentinel* that the outside merchants did not contribute to the Black community and underpaid Black employees. The “Black Dollar Days” campaign was designed as a warning to the external merchants who blocked the recycling flow of Black dollars and treated Black customers disrespectfully. The “Buy Black Hire Black” campaign of the Black Agenda was also a typical self-help movement dominated by the languages of community control.

From the perspective of community control, it should be mentioned that Black hostility toward Korean merchants was not an irrational response. It was neither an expression of jealousy nor an outburst of frustration. The languages of community control led Blacks to believe a

---

<sup>26</sup> Adolph Reed, Jr., “False Prophet II: All for One and None for All,” *The Nation*, January 28, 1991, 87-91; Dean E. Robinson, *Black Nationalism in American Politics and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 57, 124-127; Jerry G. Watts, “Racial Discourse in an Age of Social Darwinism,” *Democratic Left*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (July-August, 1990), 4; Robin D. G. Kelley, *Yo’ Mama’s Disfunktional! Fighting the Cultural Wars in Urban America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 85.

<sup>27</sup> Ivan Light, Hadas Har-Chvi, and Kenneth Kan, “Black/Korean Conflict in Los Angeles,” in Seamus Dunn, ed., *Managing Divided Cities* (London: Keele University Press, 1994), 82.

certain cause and effect story about the underdevelopment of Black capitalism and to behave in a specific way. Through the languages, Korean merchants were positioned as the external merchants who retarded the development of Black community and hence should be opposed for the well-being of the community. In this sense, the languages of community control legitimized Black hostility toward the outside merchants by leading Black people to believe that the presence of Korean merchants was the cause of their poverty and that the removal of Korean merchants would enhance their economic status.

More importantly, the languages of community control were rearticulating Black consumer politics that has enabled Blacks to use their purchasing power as consumers for political purposes since the arrival of mass consumption in the 1920s.<sup>28</sup> As historian Lizabeth Cohen wrote, mass consumption provided Blacks with an “available and legitimate recourse for challenging racial discrimination” because although Blacks were unwelcomed citizens in White America, they were desperately sought as consumers in a “Consumers’ Republic.” Blacks pursued individual consumer rights, regardless of race or color, and succeeded in “making public accommodations public.” They used mass consumption as an avenue to economic citizenship, arguing that “all consumers with Uncle Sam’s green money in their pockets” were entitled to equal treatment in a free capitalist marketplace.<sup>29</sup> By showing their spending power, as evident

---

<sup>28</sup> Mass consumption has long been addressed by American intellectuals, most of whom were inspired by historian Richard Hofstadter, the Frankfurt School, and the New Left, as a “stultifying political force” or as an “overt form of social control.” Since the early 1980s, however, scholars have begun to rediscover consumption as a “site of struggle” by paying attention to the ways it provided a sense of empowerment for women, working class people, and minorities. For a historiographical review of the study of consumption, see Meg Jacobs, “State of the Field: The Politics of Consumption,” *Reviews in American History*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (2011), 561-573.

<sup>29</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage, 2004), 89, 173-191, 370. During World War II, Blacks were also mobilized by government agencies as consumers for what Caroline Ware, a New Dealer and consumer advocate, called “the democratic control of our economy.” See Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 187-189.

in the “Black Dollar Days” campaign,” Blacks tried to redress the disrespectful treatment of Black customers by merchants. By mobilizing their purchasing power, as shown in the “Buy Black Hire Black” campaign, Blacks sought to promote self-help and community control.

It is important to note, however, that the languages of community control were the languages of the Black middle class. As Adolph Reed, Jr. pointed out, they did not address the direction of community institutions. They were not interested in asking whose interests community institutions should be controlled for. Instead, these languages were interested in administration of those institutions by the so-called Black representatives. And it was not difficult to predict who would become such representatives.<sup>30</sup> For this reason, Cornel West wrote that he could hear “the bourgeois melody” behind the nationalist rhetoric of community control. What he saw beneath the apparently radical rhetoric was an emergence of a Black middle class who were “hungry for power and starving for status.”<sup>31</sup> The economic interests of the Black middle class, as Gerald Horne explained, merged easily with Black nationalists who were useful in building the Black consumer market for the former, a well-known story of the nation-state that the consolidation of a stable national market for a bourgeois class was at the heart of the construction of national identity, sovereignty, and territory.<sup>32</sup>

Ironically, however, such a “reactionary” agenda by the Black middle class was championed “as a radical hypothesis” by most of the Black poor and working classes.<sup>33</sup> If

---

<sup>30</sup> Adolph Reed, Jr., “Black Particularity Reconsidered,” in Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., ed., *Is It Nation Time? Contemporary Essays on Black Power and Black Nationalism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 50.

<sup>31</sup> Cornel West, “The Paradox of African American Rebellion,” in *ibid.*, 31.

<sup>32</sup> Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), 188.

<sup>33</sup> Jerry G. Watts, “Reflections on the Rodney King Verdict and the Paradoxes of the Black Response,” in Robert Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 246.

businesses were controlled by Blacks, profits from these businesses were naively expected to automatically trickle down the economic ladder toward the less well-off “without any system to redistribute wealth.”<sup>34</sup> This kind of idea is little more than “neo-Booker T. Washington-style black capitalism” which urged Blacks to build their own businesses in a segregated market for self-help and racial uplift.<sup>35</sup> It is also merely a Black version of the discredited ideology of trickle-down economics: if the Black rich were more prosperous, their wealth would trickle down to the Black poor and thus any policies for redistributing wealth would be unproductive because they would prevent the rich from becoming better off. What is to be done hereafter is therefore only to repurchase stores owned by external merchants and control them in the name of community.

Furthermore, the languages of community control, as Mike Davis harshly criticized several times, would eventually bring about a “political fantasy” in which if Korean merchants were removed, Black people could be given a fertile ground for developing Black capitalism, a fantasy that “a progressive or socialist would find totally unacceptable.”<sup>36</sup> A fertile ground for such a political fantasy was cultivated by the Black cultural nationalists. Their depoliticized languages filled the vacuum left by the demise of progressive political imagination. It was such depoliticized languages that organized and structured the experiences of Blacks with Korean merchants in South Central Los Angeles by constituting the social world in which Black people

---

<sup>34</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley, *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional! Fighting the Cultural Wars in Urban America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 91.

<sup>35</sup> Manning Marable, *Beyond Black and White: Transforming African-American Politics* (London: Verso, 1996), 56. See also Manning Marable and Joseph Wilson, “Black Leadership and Organized Labor: From Workplace to Community,” in Manning Marable, Immanuel Ness, and Joseph Wilson, eds., *Race and Labor Matters in the New U.S. Economy* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 28.

<sup>36</sup> Mike Davis, “L.A. Intifada: Interviews with Mike Davis,” *Social Text*, No. 33 (1992), 20; idem, “Los Angeles: The Fire This Time: Interview with Journalist Mike Davis,” *Socialist Worker* (May, 1992), 9.

thought and acted. In the social world, as Dean E. Robinson pointed out, Blacks tended to fail to understand completely how a myriad of social problems facing themselves “had roots *outside* of America’s ghettos.”<sup>37</sup>

The languages of community control caused Blacks to accept the Black Reaganomics and to blame the underdevelopment of Black business not on structural discrimination such as the lending practices of large commercial banks but on the presence of external merchants. This was also the reason why the “dominant” of even veteran journalist James H. Cleaver’s series was the outside merchants and their disrespectful treatment of Black customers, in spite of the fact that he wrote that the “essential anger” should be directed at the banking system. In other words, while he acknowledged structural discrimination as a main target, the tip of his pen was primarily pointed at the merchants.

Meanwhile, the languages of Black nationalism became more and more focused on the presence of foreign-born merchants through the process of becoming intertwined with and underpinned by other discourses about the outside merchants. Firstly, the languages of Black nationalism quickly overlapped with old languages of Black Orientalism and reinforced each other in such a way as to make the presence of the outside merchants more clearly visible. In *Orientalism*, Edward W. Said formulated Orientalism as a way in which Asians were imagined by the West. It helps the West “to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away.”<sup>38</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, Asia, especially China, was represented by Americans as a place of splendid culture and wealth.

---

<sup>37</sup> Dean E. Robinson, *Black Nationalism in American Politics and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 102-103.

<sup>38</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978), 55.

In particular, luxuries from China gave the elite of New York a sense of cultural distinction.<sup>39</sup>

Since the mid-nineteenth century, however, American expansion into Asia and massive Chinese immigration had given birth to different stereotypes such as the “Heathen Chinese.” Chinese immigrants had been increasingly demonized as a medical, moral, and sexual menace to White society.<sup>40</sup>

Surprisingly enough, according to Helen H. Jun, the Chinese and Chinatowns had been also portrayed as pre-modern, alien, immoral, filthy, and grotesque by Black newspapers in the late nineteenth century. Although Blacks were entitled to citizenship under the Fourteenth Amendment, they continued to be subject to dehumanizing racial prejudice and violence. By subscribing to White Orientalism, Black newspapers sought after “Orientalist disidentification with Chinese immigrants” and thus tried to consolidate “[B]lack identification as U.S. national subjects.”<sup>41</sup> In the same way, the merchants of Asian descent in South Central Los Angeles were described in the *Los Angeles Sentinel* as being “irrational,” “illogical,” and “unconscionable,” a description which would discursively constitute rational, logical, and conscionable Black subjects who stood in sharp contrast to a pathological Black underclass trapped in welfare-dependency, crime, drugs, alcohol, and illiteracy. Korean immigrant merchants were also represented as unfathomable and uncivilized aliens who were incapable of rational conversation with sensitive and “[I]iterate Blacks.”<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture 1776-1882* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 3-24.

<sup>40</sup> See Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Mary Ting Yi Lui, *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery Murder, Miscegenation, and Other Dangerous Encounters in Turn-of-the-Century New York City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>41</sup> For the nineteenth century Black Orientalism, see Helen H. Jun, “Black Orientalism: Nineteenth-Century Narratives of Race and U.S. Citizenship,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 58, No. 4 (2006), 1051-1054, 1058-1061.

<sup>42</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, September 8, 1983.



Secondly, as was revealed in another public hearing held by the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations on November 9, 1983, Black hostility toward Korean merchants was exacerbated by languages of anti-Asian sentiment which were widespread in the county. Despite the fact that people of Asian descent accounted for only 6% of the total population of the county in the early 1980s, the perceptions of “Asian invasion” or “yellow horde” were rampant in the area. Asians were blamed for causing sanitation problems by bringing “all sorts of diseases” to the county. They also faced severe opposition from residents in certain areas where they began to cluster. In 1981, for example, residents of Garden Grove submitted a petition to their City Council that Asian business license applications be rejected. Besides, there was a high level of anti-Japanese sentiment due to America’s trade deficit with Japan. Such an anti-Japanese sentiment easily spread to other Asian people because, according to a report of the hearing, most non-Asians did not differentiate among various groups of Asian descent.<sup>43</sup>

Of more significance were the languages of Black nativism that intensified Black hostility toward Asians, especially Korean merchants, by highlighting Black nativeness and Asian foreignness. As was indicated by the reader’s letter sent to the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, Black people perceived themselves as founding members of the United States. The languages of Black nativeness aimed to discursively construct Blacks as U.S. national subjects by emphasizing their nativity and their contribution to building this country. However, such a discursive practice to consolidate their Americanness was pursued at the expense of ostracizing other racial and ethnic groups. In particular, people of Asian descent were considered just foreigners no matter how many years they had lived in the United States. They were considered perpetual aliens no matter

---

<sup>43</sup> Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations, *The New Asian Peril: Report of a Hearing on Rising Anti-Asian Bigotry* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations, 1984), 2, 6-10.

how fluently they could speak English.

Asian Americans have been racialized through a contradictory process by which they were placed within the American community, but at the same time they were often regarded as perpetual foreigners or aliens in the community. As Lisa Lowe mentioned, the contradiction between the U.S. economic imperatives (need of capital for cheap labor) and its nationalist political projects (imagination of the nation as a homogeneous space) was expressed in such a racialized citizenship of Asian Americans.<sup>44</sup> “Racial triangulation,” a conceptual formula suggested by Claire Jean Kim is an elaboration of such contradictory racialization of Asian Americans into two processes: a process of “relative valorization” in which Asian Americans have been valorized by Whites as superior to Blacks but inferior to Whites and a process of “civic ostracism” in which Asian Americans have been constructed by Whites as permanent foreigners.<sup>45</sup>

Born not in a vacuum but from a matrix of such multidimensional and multi-axial processes of racialization, Black nativism is a product of an uncritical appropriation of the master’s languages of nativeness to fortify the belonging of Blacks to the American community without challenging the racialization in itself. An answer elicited by a question, which was raised by Afrocentric scholar Molefi Kete Asante in a barbershop, indicated how some Black people thought about Korean immigrants: “They ain’t no Americans. They don’t act like no

---

<sup>44</sup> Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 4-8. See also David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 3; Angelo N. Ancheta, *Race, Rights, and the Asian American Experience* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 44; Moon H. Jo and Daniel D. Mast, “Changing Images of Asian Americans,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1993), 432.

<sup>45</sup> Claire Jean Kim, *Bitter Fruit: The Politics of Black-Korean Conflict in New York City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 16.

Americans.”<sup>46</sup> Despite the fact that many of the Korean merchants were naturalized citizens, they were denied the rights of belonging to the American community by Blacks who, ironically, were also denied full membership in the community because they had been racialized, according to Gary Y. Okihiro, as “citizens but not equal members of the American community.”<sup>47</sup>

### Korean American responses

The series of James H. Cleaver was obviously taken seriously by the Los Angeles Korean immigrant community. Even before the series ended, the *Hankook Ilbo* published an abridged version of the parts that had already appeared.<sup>48</sup> In particular, the series alarmed the Southern California Korean Grocery and Liquor Retail Association. Tai Joong Yun, president of the association, feared the articles would trigger racial antagonism against Korean merchants and promptly arranged a meeting with Grover Walker, executive director of the Black Agenda, on August 25, when the third part of the Cleaver series appeared. At the meeting, Yun summarized the Black discontent as five issues: Korean merchants did not give back their profits to the Black community; they did not employ Black people; they were haughty toward Black customers; they did not live in the Black community but commuted to their stores in “Cadilacs [sic] or Mercedes”; and they did not speak English. He promised that the Korean community would do “something” to alleviate the first three grievances, but emphasized that it would take long time for Korean

---

<sup>46</sup> Molefi Kete Asante, “African Americans and Korean Americans: Modeling the American Dream,” in Molefi Kete Asante and Eungjun Min, eds., *Socio-Cultural Conflict between African American and Korean American* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2000), 22.

<sup>47</sup> Gary Y. Okihiro, “Is Yellow Black or White? Revisited,” in Hazel M. McFerson, ed., *Blacks and Asians: Crossings, Conflict and Commonality* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2006), 57.

<sup>48</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, August 26, 1983 (English Section).

merchants to speak English fluently.<sup>49</sup>

The fourth complaint was caused by the antipathy of Black people toward absentee owners who were for a long time considered to be responsible for the drain on the resources of the Black community. Like most ghetto merchants, Korean immigrant merchants did not live in the Black communities where they were running businesses. Such absentee ownership of Korean merchants mirrored their residential pattern in Los Angeles. As geographer Kyung Lee pointed out, the residential area of Koreans in Los Angeles had been located south of present Koreatown but it continuously moved north to avoid “the progressive encroachment of the Negro population in the southern sector of the city.”<sup>50</sup> According to another geographer, the suburbanization of Korean immigrants also revealed that they spread through almost every area in Los Angeles County “except the South Central area” during the 1980s.<sup>51</sup> It was due to the persistence of racial preferences in the Korean community that Korean immigrant merchants did not live in the Black community. At the meeting, however, Tai Joong Yun did not acknowledge the racial aspect of the residential pattern by emphasizing that it was a matter of personal preference: “We also may have some personal reasons to live outside of the black community. They (the black community residents) should understand this.”

Yun’s response to the Cleaver series was apologetic to a certain degree. He even promised that Korean merchants would change their attitude. Several months later, however, the response of Korean community became more aggressive than the president of the grocery

---

<sup>49</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, August 29, 1983 (English Section).

<sup>50</sup> Kyung Lee, “Settlement Patterns of Los Angeles Koreans,” M.A. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1969, 65.

<sup>51</sup> Hak-Hoon Kim, “Residential Patterns and Mobility of Koreans in Los Angeles County,” M.A. thesis, California State University, Los Angeles, 1986, 55.

association had been. This aggressive turn was initiated by 1.5/second generation Korean Americans. At the hearing on anti-Asian sentiment held by the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations in November 1983, young law school graduate Tong Soo Chung, then president of the Korean American Coalition, advanced such an aggressive defense. Unlike most of the Korean merchants, who were first generation immigrants without experience in American education, Chung had been highly educated in America in such a way as to be able to adroitly contextualize his critiques of the series. He mentioned the cultural differences, anti-immigrant sentiment, and media sensationalism as factors contributing to the conflicts between Blacks and Koreans. More importantly, however, Korean merchants were positioned by him as hardworking merchants who worked long hours for the survival of family members. They were portrayed as merchants who sacrificed everything for their family. Chung described them as indispensable merchants who provided valuable services to the residents of Black community which was “unserved” by the large supermarkets. Korean merchants were represented as frontiersmen who risked their lives in the Black community which was “not the safest to do business in for anybody.”<sup>52</sup>

Responses of Korean immigrants to the Black hostility were structured by multiple languages. As was the case with the languages of Black discontent, these languages of Korean American responses set up the social world in which to interpret the conflicts between Blacks and Koreans and to behave in a specific way. Languages of culture tried to explain the conflicts in terms of the cultural differences between Blacks and Koreans. The limited-English-proficiency of Korean merchants was also identified as a source of the conflicts. Languages of media bashing provided Korean immigrants with another framework for understanding the conflicts. Media, in

---

<sup>52</sup> *Koreatown*, January-March, 1984.

particular the mainstream news media dominated by Whites, was criticized for sensationalizing the conflicts. Korean immigrants also defined the tension between Koreans and Blacks as a conflict between merchants and customers by employing languages of entrepreneurship.

Through the languages of culture, Korean immigrants sought to signify the Black-Korean conflicts as a byproduct of cultural difference that could be bridged by various cultural programs. The tension between Blacks and Koreans was also reduced by Korean immigrants to a manageable communication problem caused by their poor English proficiency. Admittedly, as many critics pointed out, the languages of culture rarely addressed the structural context of the tension. It was undeniable that the tension could not be easily removed by cultural exchange programs or dialogues.<sup>53</sup> However, the discursive practice of Korean immigrants' attaching cultural meaning to the tension could be interpreted as a crisis management effort. Korean immigrants desperately tried to transpose the flammable tension into a more easily manageable problem through the languages of culture. Various programs for cultural exchange and dialogue were proposed as a means for crisis management. Commonalities in historical experiences and collective emotions were also sought after to bridge cultural differences. Moreover, by emphasizing cultural differences, Korean immigrants tried to clear themselves of the suspicion that the conflicts were due to their racial bigotry.

Korean immigrants also made an effort to lower the high temperature of conflicts by replacing the frontline between Koreans and Blacks with a new one drawn between minorities and Whites through the languages of media bashing, specifically that the Black-Korean conflicts

---

<sup>53</sup> Margo Okazawa-Rey and Marshall Wong, "Organizing in Communities of Color: Addressing Interethnic Conflicts," *Social Justice*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (1997), Retrieved April 17, 2009 from Expanded Academic ASAP via Gale; Edward T. Chang, "Korean-Black Conflict in Los Angeles: Perceptions and Realities," *Korean Observer*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (1989), 365; Bong Hwan Kim, "As American As Possible," in Elaine H. Kim and Eui-Young Yu, eds., *East to America: Korean American Life Stories* (New York: The New Press, 1996), 350.

were manufactured by media. Even non-Korean Richard Fruto, a journalist who once worked for the *Hankook Ilbo*, still argued that the relations between Koreans and Blacks were largely peaceful and that the major media nevertheless deliberately focused on stories of tension between the two groups.<sup>54</sup> Evidently, the mainstream media often exacerbated the Black-Korean conflicts by pitting Korean merchants against Blacks. However, it would be too optimistic to say that relations had been harmonious before they were distorted by the media. As Pyong Gap Min maintained, the conflicts were “real and significant” in such a way that they could not be simply reduced to a media construction.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, Korean immigrants, in particular those with progressive political views, tried to understand the conflicts through the languages of media bashing to insist that the tension was not confined to an issue facing only two groups but should be extended to the larger context involving the dominant group. While Nancy Abelmann and John Lie did not deny that there was tension between Black customers and Korean merchants, they also devoted their research efforts to studying the media frame of the Black-Korean conflicts as if the conflicts could be reduced to individual and trivial issues.<sup>56</sup>

In the meanwhile, the hostility of Black customers toward Korean merchants did not remain as a dispute between customers and merchants in ghetto stores but was easily escalated into a community issue by two mechanisms. Firstly, Korean immigrants tended to identify their interests with those of co-ethnic merchants who experienced Black hostility. As Pyong Gap Min

---

<sup>54</sup> Richard Fruto, “Revisiting the Scene of Crime,” *KoreAm Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (April, 2007), 82-84.

<sup>55</sup> Pyong Gap Min, [Review of the book *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots*], *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 101, No. 2 (Sep., 1995), 522.

<sup>56</sup> Nancy Abelmann and John Lie, *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 148-149, 158-160; John Lie and Nancy Abelmann, “The 1992 Los Angeles Riots and the ‘Black-Korean Conflict,’” in Kwang Chung Kim, ed., *Koreans in the Hood: Conflict with African Americans* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 79-80.

explained, the hostility was considered a significant threat not only to Korean merchants but also to most of the Korean employees who planned to start their own small businesses sooner or later. Korean professionals such as lawyers, accountants, and pastors felt as much threatened as Korean storefront employees by the hostility because Korean merchants were their important clientele.<sup>57</sup> The Korean ethnic media also contributed to the escalation by devoting extensive coverage to the hostility. Stories about the conflicts circulated quickly and readily through well-developed ethnic networks such as ethnic Korean churches. Secondly, stories about disputes in stores spread widely through the Black community by way of rumor. According to Sung Hak Choi, who did ethnographic research at a Korean-owned grocery store in South Central Los Angeles, when Black customers and bystanders experienced direct or indirect maltreatment by Korean merchants, they tended to remember their experiences and to repeatedly tell them to their community members.<sup>58</sup> Rumor were born through such repetition. As some critics explained, the rumor rapidly traveled among its recipients and it was elaborated or exaggerated by anonymous collectives while traveling. But the elaboration or exaggeration was not a random process. Rather, the rumor was altered to be more meaningful to its recipients, reflecting “the hopes, fears, and worldview of those” recipients.<sup>59</sup> In this way, an individual dispute that occurred during a transaction between a customer and a merchant escalated into an issue of community through the process of being rumored. While being repeatedly transmitted orally to Black community

---

<sup>57</sup> Pyong Gap Min, *Caught in the Middle: Korean Communities in New York and Los Angeles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 221-222.

<sup>58</sup> Sung Hak Choi, “‘Trouble City’: Korean-Black Conflict in Inner City Los Angeles: 1994-2003,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2003, 204.

<sup>59</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 144-145. See also Donald L. Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 75.



members, the rumor was altered to reflect some common concerns such as their aspiration for community control and their antipathy toward Asian people.

However, Korean immigrants actively sought to describe the Black-Korean conflicts, which were likely to escalate to an issue at the community level, as nothing more than a tension inherent in any transaction between customers and merchants. By making claims based on languages of entrepreneurship, they tried to exempt themselves from the charge that their racial stereotypes contributed to the conflicts. While emphasizing the diversity within each ethnic group, Edward T. Chang and Jeannette Diaz-Veizades also insisted that the conflicts should be understood as occurring between Korean merchants and Black customers in South Central Los Angeles.<sup>60</sup> Besides, the languages of entrepreneurship were also easily intertwined with languages of criminality, which enabled Korean immigrants to delegitimize the Black discontents as just problems caused by a Black criminal underclass. The more strongly Korean immigrants experienced the tension with the Black community, the more frequently they employed the languages of criminality.

### Model minority discourse

More significantly, the languages of entrepreneurship constituted the subject-position from which Korean immigrant merchants were constituted as a hardworking model minority who personified the American Dream. According to Lisa C. Ikemoto, such positioning was to place Koreans as White relative to Blacks in American racial order as Blacks were placed as White

---

<sup>60</sup> Edward T. Chang and Jeannette Diaz-Veizades, *Ethnic Peace in the American City: Building Community in Los Angeles and Beyond* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 124-125.

relative to Koreans when they made nativist arguments against Korean immigrant merchants.<sup>61</sup> The representations of Korean merchants presented by Tong Soo Chung while addressing Cleaver's series were also structured by the languages of the model minority, which positioned Korean merchants as evidence of the American Dream by describing them as hardworking, diligent, highly disciplined, highly motivated, family-oriented, education-oriented, and respectful of authority.

As Robert G. Lee pointed out, however, the model minority was nothing less than a "simulacrum," a copy with no original. According to Lee, the discourse of model minority was created in the 1950s to help to contain three menaces that "haunted Cold War America." Against the communist propaganda to the Third World countries that America was a White supremacist country as much as their former European colonial rulers, the model minority discourse helped to disseminate the counter-propaganda to the newly independent countries that America was the land of opportunity opened for racial minorities. By representing Asian Americans as "politically silent and ethnically assimilable" minorities, it also helped to contain the Black menace revealed in political demand of Blacks for the elimination of racial discrimination. Lastly, the model minority discourse, which focused on Asian female domesticity as well as their successful assimilation into American patriarchal nuclear family, was effectively employed as a weapon to combat the White menace, which was increasingly revealed in the dissolution of the heterosexual nuclear family.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Lisa C. Ikemoto, "Traces of the Master Narrative in the Story of African American/Korean American Conflict: How We Constructed 'Los Angeles,'" *Southern California Law Review*, Vol. 66 (May, 1993), 1590.

<sup>62</sup> Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 145-179; idem, "Fu Manchu Lives! Asian Pacific Americans as Permanent Aliens in American Culture," in Paul M. Ong, ed., *The State of Asian Pacific America: Transforming Race Relations* (Los Angeles: LEAP Asian Pacific American Public Policy Institute and UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 2000), 181-184.

Even though the model minority was a political construct which was obviously not invented to empower Asian Americans, it was true that it helped to neutralize the negative images of Asian Americans. The discourse of the model minority unintentionally made it possible for Asian Americans to partially shed their previous negative images such as the deviant and the yellow peril. Due to the reformed images, as Donald Teruo Hata, Jr. and Nadine Ishitani Hata maintained, they were increasingly able to join the tide of suburbanization after the early 1950s. According to Camille Zubrinsky Charles, people of Asian descent were much preferred by Whites to Latinos and Blacks in terms of residential integration. Korean immigrants in Los Angeles also successfully joined the tide in such a way that they created several suburban enclaves in some areas such as Cerritos, the San Fernando Valley, the South Bay, Glendale, and Walnut-Diamond Bar during the 1980s.<sup>63</sup>

Like Tong Soo Chung, many Korean immigrants bought into the languages of model minority. Even some Korean American scholars portrayed Korean immigrant merchants as being committed to an “Asian version of the Protestant ethic.”<sup>64</sup> In the 1980s, conservative politicians

---

<sup>63</sup> Donald Teruo Hata, Jr. and Nadine Ishitani Hata, “Asian-Pacific Angelinos: Model Minorities and Indispensable Scapegoats,” in Norman M. Klein and Martin J. Schiesl, eds., *20th Century Los Angeles: Power, Promotion, and Social Conflict* (Claremont, Calif.: Regina Books, 1990), 81; Camille Zubrinsky Charles, “Residential Segregation in Los Angeles,” in Lawrence D. Bobo, et al eds., *Prismatic Metropolis: Inequality in Los Angeles* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2000), 185; On the suburbanization of Korean immigrants in Los Angeles, see Ali Modarres, *The Racial and Ethnic Structure of Los Angeles County: A Geographic Guide* (Los Angeles: Edmund G “Pat” Brown Institute of Public Affairs, California State University, Los Angeles, 1994), 52; James P. Allen and Eugene Turner, *The Ethnic Quilt: Population Diversity in Southern California* (Northridge, Calif.: The Center for Geographical Studies, California State University, Northridge, 1997), 150-151. Although Korean immigrants were increasingly dispersed to suburban areas in Los Angeles, their suburbanization has been following a pattern of “decentralized concentration.” Moreover, their suburbanization did not always mean that they were proportionately integrated into American society and culture. Irrespective of their residential places, Korean immigrants have shown strong ethnic identity and attachment by virtue of ethnic apparatuses such as ethnic media and church. For this reason, Hans Dieter Laux and Günter Thieme described the settlement pattern of Korean immigrants as “multiclustered, with a relatively high level of spatial and social separation.” See Hans Dieter Laux and Günter Thieme, “Koreans in Greater Los Angeles: Socioeconomic Polarization, Ethnic Attachment, and Residential Patterns,” in Wei Li, ed., *From Urban Enclave to Ethnic Suburb: New Asian Communities in Pacific Rim Countries* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 118.

<sup>64</sup> Kwang Chung Kim and Shin Kim, “The Multiracial Nature of Los Angeles Unrest in 1992,” in Kwang Chung Kim, ed., *Koreans in the Hood: Conflict with African Americans* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press,

actively deployed ideologically potent model minority discourse against the poor, especially Blacks. President Reagan referred to Asian Americans as “our exemplars of hope.”<sup>65</sup> They were constructed as the embodiment of the “moral vision of capitalism in the 1980s: a celebration of traditional values, an emphasis on hard work and self-reliance, a respect for authority, and an attack on prevailing civil rights thinking associated with the African American community.”<sup>66</sup> This model minority discourse was accepted too easily and uncritically by many Korean immigrants who, as discussed in the previous chapter, had been imbued with the free enterprise values of individual initiative and self-reliance imported from the United States before they immigrated to the United States.

These languages of model minority operated as a dual-edged sword. On the one hand, Korean immigrants sought for upward mobility by positioning themselves as a model minority which was assimilable to mainstream America and dissociated from other people of color. As Nadia Kim argued, this positioning could be understood as an effort to overcome their specific racialization, which ostracized them as perpetual foreigners placed outside the American community.<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, however, the model minority discourse tended to override both differences within a specific ethnic group and differences among various Asian descent groups. More importantly, as Pyong Gap Min found, a majority of Korean immigrant merchants in Black communities also more strongly believed that the poverty of Black people was due to their

---

1999), 32.

<sup>65</sup> Frank H. Wu, *Yellow: Race in America beyond Black and White* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 41.

<sup>66</sup> Glenn Omatsu, “The ‘Four Prisons’ and the Movements of Liberation: Asian American Activism from the 1960s to the 1990s,” in Karin Aguilar-San Juan, ed., *The State of Asian America: Activism and Resistance in the 1990s* (Boston: South End Press, 1994), 63.

<sup>67</sup> Nadia Kim, “A View from Below: An Analysis of Korean Americans’ Racial Attitudes,” *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2004), 16.

cultural poverty than White Americans did.<sup>68</sup> This was because Korean immigrants deeply internalized through the discourse of the model minority the master's languages of racialization that delegitimized Black demands for social services by blaming Black poverty on their presumed cultural deficiencies. Besides, as some critics pointed out, the model minority had the perpetual foreigner as an inverted twin. Asian American virtues, which were invoked to define them as model minorities, could also be utilized to construct them as the perpetual foreigner or the new yellow peril. As Gary Okihiro maintained, models could easily become perils and vice versa:

Asian workers can be “diligent” and “slavish,” “frugal” and “cheap,” “upwardly mobile” and “aggressive,” while Asian families and communities can be “mutual aid” and “self-serving” institutions, “inclusive” and “exclusive” groupings, “multicultural enclaves” and “balkanized ghettos.” Asian religious beliefs can be characterized as “transcendentalism” and “paganism,” “filial piety” and “superstition,” while intermarriage can indicate “assimilation” and “mongrelization,” “integration” and “infiltration,” and children can be “our second-generation problem” and “our amazing Chinese kids.”<sup>69</sup>

### Apolitical Korean immigrants?

Social discourses are constructed as stories through which various events are coherently given meanings. Such a signification makes it possible for subjects to make sense of the world

---

<sup>68</sup> Pyong Gap Min, *Caught in the Middle: Korean Communities in New York and Los Angeles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 121. See also Edward T. Chang, “Korean-Black Conflict in Los Angeles: Perceptions and Realities,” *Korean Observer*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (1989), 370.

<sup>69</sup> Gary Y. Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 141-142. See also Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 190; Frank H. Wu, op. cit., 77.

and “imagine themselves as agents within it.”<sup>70</sup> Likewise, Korean immigrants made sense of their tension with Blacks through the available languages that enabled them to have a sense of agency and provided a particular meaning to events that occurred between Blacks and Koreans. Korean immigrants also made competing claims about the tension by appropriating relevant languages. It was through these languages that a politics of Korean immigrants was produced. Politics, as historian Keith Michael Baker has explained in his study of the French Revolution, can be defined as the activity of making such claims. Politics can refer to an activity through which individuals and groups try to “articulate, negotiate, implement, and enforce the competing claims” against each other by employing a “set of discourses or symbolic practices.”<sup>71</sup>

To pay attention to the languages which articulated and structured the experience of Korean immigrants was therefore to shed new light on the politics of Korean immigrants who have long been considered to be apolitical. They were perceived as a politically passive group by even Korean American scholars. For example, political scientist Jae Hyung Chai argued that Korean Americans were apathetic to the politics of the host society. They were criticized as being “politically ignorant” and “politically irrational.” By borrowing a term from Elmer Eric Schattschneider, Chai warned that Korean Americans could be in danger of becoming “semi-sovereign people” due to their political shortcomings.<sup>72</sup> Edward T. Chang, one of the leading scholars of Korean American studies who produced a large number of academic works on the Black-Korean conflicts and was frequently interviewed on the conflicts by the media, also

---

<sup>70</sup> James Vernon, “Who’s Afraid of the ‘Linguistic Turn’? The Politics of Social History and Its Discontents,” *Social History*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (January, 1994), 91.

<sup>71</sup> Keith Michael Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 4.

<sup>72</sup> Jae Hyung Chai, “The Korean-American Community and U.S. Politics,” in Tae-Hwan Kwak and Seong Hyong Lee, eds., *The Korean-American Community: Present and Future* (Seoul: Kyungnam University Press, 1991), 94-97.

maintained that Korean Americans were apolitical. According to him, Korean immigrants were disproportionately interested in securing individual economic stability rather than in developing collective political activity, which was preferred by Blacks for pursuing their economic interests. He explained the other reasons why Korean immigrants were apolitical as follows:

There are some other possible reasons why Korean immigrants tend to be apolitical. The number of Korean (Asian) Americans has been too small to be effective in the domestic electoral political process until recently. Thus, they have not had a chance to develop a tradition of political activism. In addition, many Korean immigrants came to America to avoid a dictatorial regime, corruption, and war; thus, they do not wish to be involved with political activities. Furthermore, the Korean government has kept close watch of the political activities of Korean Americans. Many Korean Americans avoid active participation in politics because they are intimidated, and politics are irrelevant in comparison to their immediate goal of achieving economic security...Lastly, many Korean immigrants still regard America as an unfamiliar country where they do not yet feel at home.<sup>73</sup>

Korean Americans were criticized for lacking even “self-determination” by this leading Korean American scholar.<sup>74</sup> Such understandings of the politics of Korean immigrants, however, were unconsciously reproducing the popular perception of Asian Americans as politically inactive. As Bill Ong Hing pointed out, Asian Americans have been portrayed as passive and docile people not suited for politics.<sup>75</sup> Of course, if we were to narrowly define politics as the

---

<sup>73</sup> Edward T. Chang, “New Urban Crisis: Intra-Third World Conflict,” in Shirley Hune, Hyung-chan Kim, Stephen S. Fugita, and Amy Ling, eds., *Asian Americans: Comparative and Global Perspectives* (Pullman, Washington: Washington State University Press, 1991), 174.

<sup>74</sup> Edward T. Chang, “Los Angeles ‘Riots’ and the Korean-American Community,” in Ho-Youn Kwon, ed., *Korean Americans: Conflict and Harmony* (Chicago: Center for Korean Studies, North Park College and Theological Seminary, 1994), 173.

<sup>75</sup> Bill Ong Hing, *Making and Remaking Asian America through Immigration Policy, 1850-1990* (Stanford: Stanford

electoral politics for getting people into public office, Korean immigrants in Los Angeles appeared to be apolitical because there were very few elected officials from the Korean American community. Even in the field of electoral politics, however, the reason why they looked as if they were apolitical was neither because they were lacking self-determination nor because they did not want to get involved in political activities. Rather, it could be argued that the political structure of Los Angeles prohibited Korean immigrants from participating in electoral politics. As Roger Waldinger explained, unlike the legacies of machine politics in New York City that encouraged immigrants, including Korean Americans, to participate in city politics, the tradition of reform politics in Los Angeles did not provide such opportunities to immigrants.<sup>76</sup> In New York City, the political machine was used by immigrants as a vehicle to express and organize their ethnic interests. In Los Angeles, however, such a machine was abolished by the Progressive reform movement of the early twentieth century, and with it was removed the vehicle by which immigrants could have engaged in politics.

If we, following Keith Michael Baker, expand our understanding of politics to incorporate discursive practices by which competing claims are made, we can find that Korean

---

University Press, 1993), 153.

<sup>76</sup> Roger Waldinger, "From Ellis Island to LAX: Immigrant Prospects in the American City," *International Migration Review*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Winter, 1996), 1083-1085. When a Korean merchant was beaten by the police in Elmhurst, Queens in October 1984, according to Kyeyoung Park, Korean immigrants responded to the police by organizing the Korean American Association of Mid-Queens. After another incident of police brutality against a Korean cab driver occurred in March 1985, two organizations of young Korean American activists (Korean Americans for Social Concern and Young Koreans United) also made efforts to speak on behalf of Korean immigrants. Korean Americans in New York mounted a demonstration against police brutality in April 1985. They also formed a cooperative relationship between Koreans and Blacks to effectively respond to police violence. Korean Americans in New York also deeply got involved in city politics when they supported a bill for commercial rent control (Into. 914) in 1985. This bill was introduced to place a limit on commercial rent increases and became a hot issue during the 1985 Democratic mayoral primary. Many Korean immigrants were small business owners and thus endorsed Carol Bellamy who, unlike the incumbent Mayor Ed Koch, supported the bill. For the passage of the bill, about a thousand Korean immigrant merchants also exerted their political muscles by mounting a demonstration. By the mid-1980s, Korean immigrants, as Kyeyoung Park mentioned, "no longer stood outside the politics of New York City." See Kyeyoung Park, *The Korean American Dream: Immigrants and Small Business in New York City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 171-182.



immigrants in Los Angeles were active agents in dealing with the tension with the Black community. Moreover, to quote Baker again, discursive practices comprise “the definitions of the relative subject-positions from which individuals and groups may (or may not) legitimately make claims one upon another, and therefore of the identity and boundaries of the community to which they belong.”<sup>77</sup> If we try to see Korean immigrants from this perspective, it becomes clear that they were not apolitical bystanders at all. They were active agents who tried to protect their interests through various discursive practices. In doing so, Korean immigrants also actively challenged and identified with subject positions assigned to them in discursive fields.

By employing the languages of cultural difference as a crisis management strategy, they not only deemphasized the racial aspects of the Black-Korean conflicts but also tried to develop various programs to bridge the differences. By appropriating the languages of media bashing, they not only revealed the divide-and-conquer strategy of the mainstream media but also tried to contextualize the Black-Korean conflicts within a larger social framework. Korean immigrants also adroitly used the languages of entrepreneurship to insist that the Black-Korean conflicts were just a trivial problem that occurred between customers and merchants. Korean immigrants challenged their representation as disrespectful ghetto merchants by deploying these discursive frames of cultural differences, media sensationalism, and entrepreneurship. Furthermore, as the conflicts became more violent than ever, Korean immigrants tried to delegitimize the Black discontents with the presence of Korean merchants in the Black community by identifying themselves as a hardworking model minority, even though it was an appropriation of the master’s languages of racialization. In this sense, as Claire Jean Kim mentioned, they were “historical agents” who actively negotiated “the distinct opportunities and constraints presented within the

---

<sup>77</sup> Keith Michael Baker, *op. cit.*, 4.

American racial order.”<sup>78</sup>

### Languages of alliances between Blacks and Koreans

The hostility of Blacks toward Korean immigrant merchants caused Korean ethnic churches to initiate various programs for improving the relations between the two groups. For Korean immigrants, churches have been more than just religious entities. Korean ethnic churches have been playing various political, social, and cultural roles for the immigrants since the first wave of their immigration to the United States. As Kwang Chung Kim and Shin Kim explained, Korean ethnic churches played “an amalgamation of religious and social roles” to fulfill various needs of Korean immigrants. They were, according to Illsoo Kim, “the surrogates of ethnic neighborhoods” to fill a vacuum of effective community organizations. They played a broker’s role between the voiceless immigrants and the dominant society.<sup>79</sup> It was therefore quite natural that Korean ethnic churches tried to intervene in the Black-Korean conflicts.

It is noteworthy that Korean ethnic churches in Los Angeles, according to Pyong Gap Min, made greater efforts to improve the relations between Blacks and Koreans than their counterparts in New York.<sup>80</sup> This was probably because immigrants had few community-based organizations to express and organize their ethnic interests in reform cities such as Los Angeles.

---

<sup>78</sup> Claire Jean Kim, *Bitter Fruit: The Politics of Black-Korean Conflict in New York City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 11.

<sup>79</sup> Kwang Chung Kim and Shin Kim, “Ethnic Roles of Korean Immigrant Churches in the United States,” in Ho-Youn Kwon, Kwang Chung Kim, and R. Stephen Warner, eds., *Korean Americans and Their Religions: Pilgrims and Missionaries from a Different Shore* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 92; Illsoo Kim, *New Urban Immigrants: The Korean Community in New York* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 191.

<sup>80</sup> Pyong Gap Min, *Caught in the Middle: Korean Communities in New York and Los Angeles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 136.

Moreover, unlike some Korean American scholars' estimation that the race relations between Blacks and Koreans were better in Los Angeles than in New York City, the different degrees of involvement by Korean ethnic churches between the two cities indicated that the conflicts were no less intense in Los Angeles than in New York, even though the conflicts were less publicly articulated in the reform city which had few organizations for such political activities.<sup>81</sup>

Through various programs for cultural exchange and mutual understanding, Korean ethnic churches in Los Angeles tried to decrease the tension between Blacks and Koreans. In February 1985, about ten Korean religious leaders met a similar number of Black pastors to sign an agreement for alleviating the conflicts. The religious leaders from both communities focused on the cultural, social, and linguistic barriers as obstacles to effective communication. These religious leaders hoped to promote mutual understanding by emphasizing the religious similarities between the two communities. Congressman Mervyn Dymally, who initiated the meeting of religious leaders, observed that "It is proper that we should start out in a religious setting." Korean church members of the Oriental Mission Church, probably the largest Korean ethnic church in the United States, invited the Rev. Jerome Fisher of Little Zion Baptist Missionary Church and the church's choir to their Sunday morning service. At the joint service, the Korean church presented a \$5,000 scholarship for Black students. Korean religious leaders also agreed with Black church members to build a cultural bridge between the two communities by holding a Korean festival in Compton in association with the Brotherhood Crusade, a Black non-profit organization that would be at the center of boycotts of Korean-owned stores six years later.<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup> On the comparison of race relations by Korean American scholars between Los Angeles and New York, see Pyong Gap Min, *ibid.*, 83; Edward T. Chang, "African American Boycotts of Korean-Owned Stores in New York and Los Angeles," in Paul R. Brass, ed., *Riots and Pogroms* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 240.

<sup>82</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, February 21, 1985.

By framing the conflicts through the languages of cultural or linguistic differences and emphasizing dialogue and mutual understanding based on a religious commonality between Blacks and Koreans, Korean ethnic churches tried to convert the volatile tension into a less severe and more easily manageable problem. Not only the Oriental Mission Church, but also many other Korean ethnic churches in Los Angeles joined the efforts to relieve the tension. However, the tension was too deeply rooted in structural inequalities to be alleviated by cultural exchange programs and goodwill activities. In the spring of 1986, the tension, which could not be easily mitigated, erupted into the murders of four Korean merchants. On March 30, a Korean merchant who had operated a liquor store in Watts since the previous year was shot to death by one youngster among eight to ten Blacks who tried to leave the store without paying for their beers. On April 15, Jeong-Keun Chung and his wife Jeong-Ran Chung, who had a five-year-old son and a three-year-old daughter, were stabbed to death by two Black suspects in their liquor and check cashing store at 60th Street and Normandie Avenue. Eight days later, a young Korean male who was working until midnight in a hamburger restaurant owned by his family was shot in the chest by two Black suspects.<sup>83</sup>

Although there was no evidence that the four murders were racially motivated, as Edward T. Chang noted, they were a sign of the accumulated and unmitigated tension between the two communities.<sup>84</sup> In particular, the Korean community was overcome with apprehensions about the potential for violence. Unlike the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, which paid little attention to the murders, the *Hankook Ilbo* functioned as a public sphere for

---

<sup>83</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, March 31, April 15, and April 23, 1986.

<sup>84</sup> Edward T. Chang and Jeannette Diaz-Veizades, *Ethnic Peace in the American City: Building Community in Los Angeles and Beyond* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 34.

Korean immigrants to express such anxiety and fear. As long as Korean merchants were running businesses in the Black community, they thought it was a matter of time before another co-ethnic merchant would become the next victim. The tragic killings of Korean merchants increasingly led them to rely on the languages of criminality to understand the tension between Blacks and Koreans. An association of Korean grocery and liquor merchants in Southern California offered a \$10,000 reward for the arrest of the Chung couple's murderers. The association presented a two-track strategy for protecting Korean merchants from any possible violence: one was to continue an effort to improve the relations with the Black community in association with the NAACP; the other was to attract the attention of the police and the media to the victimization of Korean merchants by emphasizing the criminal aspect of the killings.<sup>85</sup> Los Angeles County Supervisor Mike Antonovich added fuel to the criminalization approach by saying that Korean merchants contributed to the local economy through their business activities and that the death penalty should be resumed to prevent criminals from killing these innocent people without any fear.<sup>86</sup> Echoing the argument of Antonovich, a *Hankook Ilbo* editorial demanded a crime-prevention campaign to avoid the repetition of the "cruellest month," highly praising the idea of the merchant association to put the price on the head of the murderers.<sup>87</sup>

While the killings of Korean merchants stimulated the Republican county supervisor to express his conservative opinion, they also led the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations to assist in the formation of the Black-Korean Alliance, which would be incorporated as a non-profit organization in 1987. An impetus for the formation of the alliance originated from

---

<sup>85</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, April 17 and 18, 1986.

<sup>86</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, April 21, 1986.

<sup>87</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, April 24, 1986.

the hearing which was held in Inglewood City Hall by the county commission in April 1983. In response to the Black-Korean issues raised at the hearing, the county commission launched a program “to improve dialogue and communication between local residents and Korean merchants in Southeast Los Angeles” in late 1984. The staff of the commission also provided the two communities with assistance in forming the Black-Korean Coalition which aimed “to develop a model for facilitating dialogue in a target area and then use the model in other areas with similar problems.”<sup>88</sup>

The “cruellest month” of 1986 resuscitated the bi-racial coalition which, according to Edward T. Chang, had remained inactive during the first couple of years because there were no conspicuous signs of tension between the two communities. The month after the killings of Korean merchants witnessed the first meeting of the Black-Korean Community Relations Committee, which would be renamed the Black-Korean Alliance. The primary objective of the alliance was not to intervene in disputes between the two communities but “to disseminate positive information and take adequate preventive measures.” The alliance put an emphasis on facilitating dialogue as a means to relieve the intergroup tension.<sup>89</sup> As of July 1987, the alliance had thirty-six members including two police officers: Jesse Brewer, African American Deputy Chief of the LAPD and Lieutenant J. D. Trent of the South Bureau of the LAPD. By August 1987, the alliance established six sub-committees to address the tension: Community Education and Cultural Exchange Committee; Crime Prevention Committee; Religious Leadership

---

<sup>88</sup> “A Project to Improve Black-Korean Relations in South Central Los Angeles,” folder 14, box 3690, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers.

<sup>89</sup> Edward T. Chang, “Building Minority Coalitions: A Case Study of Korean and African Americans,” *Korea Journal of Population and Development*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (July, 1992), 40; Edward T. Chang and Jeannette Diaz-Veizades, *Ethnic Peace in the American City: Building Community in Los Angeles and Beyond* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 123.

Committee; Fundraising Committee; Economic Development Committee; and an Ad Hoc Committee for Christmas Basket Project.<sup>90</sup>

The Black-Korean Alliance also drew attention from the Los Angeles City government. Julia Williams from the Mayor's Office for Small Business Assistance represented the mayor on the alliance and joined the sub-committee for economic development. In a letter sent to deputy mayor Mike Gage, the mayor's staff person Julie Tugend evaluated the alliance as being "fairly active and a good base to network from." She also recommended a mayoral visit to the alliance instead of just sending the Korean community a letter requesting that they should hire more Black youths. She explained such a letter would not only anger the Korean merchants but also alienate the Korean community leaders who felt that they had worked hard to reduce the tension.<sup>91</sup> As Chinese American journalist Helen Zia mentioned, the Black-Korean Alliance provided Korean immigrants in Los Angeles with a political vehicle through which they were able to take "positive steps" to get involved in mainstream politics. As members of the alliance, they began to be acquainted themselves with influential political figures such as the mayor and government officials.<sup>92</sup>

However, as many critics pointed out, such a political vehicle was exclusively utilized by elite groups only. The Black-Korean Alliance was "a good base to network" for elites from

---

<sup>90</sup> "Black-Korean Community Relations Committee: Members," folder 14, box 3690, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers; "Meeting Summary: Black-Korean Community Relations Committee, Steering Committee Meeting, August 4, 1987," folder 14, box 3690, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers. By 1990, however, only three sub-committees for community education and cultural exchange, religious leadership, and economic development had remained functional. See a pamphlet titled "BKA: Black Korean Alliance," file HR/00 P037e-002, box D-1295, The Los Angeles City Records Center and Archives.

<sup>91</sup> "Letter from Julie Tugend to Mike Gage (Subject: Black/Korean Conflict)," December 24, 1987, folder 14, box 3690, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers.

<sup>92</sup> Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), 175.

the two communities. It was not based in the grassroots communities but devoted to forming a channel for dialogue at the top level in the two communities. To make matters worse, many members of the alliance did not have a strong constituency base in their communities. For some members who had such a constituency, the intergroup tension was not their first priority. As a Korean American reporter recalled on a radio show, the leadership of the alliance thus failed to “penetrate the street.”<sup>93</sup> Besides, the alliance suffered not only from a lack of human and fiscal resources but also a lack of consensus on critical issues because members tended to put their individual gains and racial loyalties above a common interest. Furthermore, the alliance also spent too much energy on the war on media coverage. It even created a “Media Ad Hoc Committee” to criticize the tendency of the media toward sensationalism and to “improve coverage of Black-Korean relations.”<sup>94</sup> While such an effort of the alliance to battle against the media was to contextualize the Black-Korean conflicts into the broader social structure involving the dominant group and to resist the media politics of divide-and-conquer, it led the alliance to work “more with the news media than its communities.”<sup>95</sup>

While evaluating the activities of the Black-Korean Alliance, Pyong Gap Min wrote that it played a significant role in maintaining race relations between Blacks and Koreans in Los

---

<sup>93</sup> “Black-Korean Tension Still Exists in L.A.,” *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio, April 29, 1993, Retrieved January 1, 2009 from the Nexis TV and Radio Broadcast Transcripts. On the limitations of the Black-Korean Alliance, see also Yasmin Theresa Tong, “In the Middle: Mediating Black-Korean Conflict in South Central Los Angeles,” M.A. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1992, 35-37; Elaine H. Kim, “Between Black and White: An Interview with Bong Hwan Kim,” in Karin Aguilar-San Juan, ed., *The State of Asian America: Activism and Resistance in the 1990s* (Boston: South End Press, 1994), 82-86; James A. Regalado, “Community Coalition-Building,” in Mark Baldassare, ed., *The Los Angeles Riots: Lessons for the Urban Future* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 221-222; idem, “Creating Multicultural Harmony? A Critical Perspective on Coalition-Building Efforts in Los Angeles,” in Eui-Young Yu and Edward T. Chang, eds., *Multicultural Coalition Building in Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Institute for Asian American and Pacific Asian Studies, California State University, Los Angeles, 1995), 46.

<sup>94</sup> “Black-Korean Alliance: General Meeting,” November 14, 1990, folder 16, box 4248, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers.

<sup>95</sup> Helen Zia, *op. cit.*, 180.



Angeles in a better state than those in New York.<sup>96</sup> Edward T. Chang also argued that Los Angeles did not experience violent collisions between Blacks and Koreans because the alliance effectively reduced the tension in the city.<sup>97</sup> Contrary to their favorable assessment, however, the alliance was not effective in reducing the tension. As Patrick D. Joyce pointed out, the alliance was reactive rather than preemptive in dealing with the tension in such a way that it was devoted not to preventing conflicts but to shaping “the public dialogue surrounding conflicts.”<sup>98</sup> Even such public dialogue was so exclusively confined to elite groups of the two communities that the alliance was little known among Korean immigrant merchants and Black residents in Los Angeles.<sup>99</sup> The Korean community even cast a suspicious glance at the alliance when it later announced a plan to take a more active role in relieving the tension.<sup>100</sup>

---

<sup>96</sup> Pyong Gap Min, *Caught in the Middle: Korean Communities in New York and Los Angeles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 83-84.

<sup>97</sup> Edward T. Chang, “Building Minority Coalitions: A Case Study of Korean and African Americans,” *Korea Journal of Population and Development*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (July, 1992), 54-55.

<sup>98</sup> Patrick D. Joyce, *No Fire Next Time: Black-Korean Conflicts and the Future of America's Cities* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 126.

<sup>99</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, November 8, 1989 and July 12, 1990.

<sup>100</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, January 16, 1992.

## Chapter Three

### Exacerbation of Conflict

While the tension between Black customers and Korean shopkeepers in Los Angeles mounted over several years and finally took the form of boycotts of Korean-owned stores between 1987 and 1989, such collective actions against Korean immigrant merchants did not last for long periods of time because there were few Black organizations which were able to sustain long-term boycotts. The Los Angeles Black community in the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, witnessed the emergence of Danny Bakewell, an incendiary figure who was president of the Brotherhood Crusade, a charity organization in the Black community. In the absence of a left and progressive political imagination, his inflammatory rhetoric against “outside” merchants was easily intertwined with the languages of community control, further racializing the customer-storekeeper relationship and tensions. In 1991, when Korean shopkeeper Soon Ja Du murdered a Black teenage girl named Latasha Harlins, and Korean merchant Tae Sam Park shot to death a Black male named Lee Arthur Mitchell in their respective stores in South Central Los Angeles, such tensions escalated to an unprecedented level.

Tracing the escalation of conflict, this chapter examines how Los Angeles City and County governments responded, and why their approaches ultimately proved inadequate to defuse the tensions. It then explores the Harlins-Du incident. The murder of a teenage girl was volatile enough to provoke a catastrophic crisis between Blacks and Koreans. This study, based on archival research of municipal records as well as Korean-language media, focuses on discursive practices by which Korean Americans attempted to repudiate the charges that an innocent young Black girl was killed by a disrespectful Korean merchant. It will help us understand how Korean Americans navigated the discursive terrain of American race relations to

relieve themselves of accountability for the crisis. Brenda E. Stevenson and Neil Gotanda have provided valuable insights into how Harlins was characterized as a defeminized and amoral criminal, whereas Du's portrayal as an innocent, credible, domestic woman by her defense attorneys was adopted by judge in the trial courtroom.<sup>1</sup> The present analysis expands these discussions to present the multivalence of Korean Americans' discursive practices, incorporating an examination of the Korean American public sphere in which they challenged their representation as disrespectful and ruthless ghetto merchants by deracializing Du's shooting of Harlins through languages of cultural difference, police manipulation, and media sensationalism, and by a gendered reracializing of the teenager through discourses from the Jim Crow era and before, which were rooted in a range of moral and biological stereotypes regarding Blacks.

When Tae Sam Park shot Mitchell in his business, John's Liquor Store, about three months after the murder of Harlins, Korean Americans represented Park as a courageous husband while dehumanizing Mitchell as a monster unafraid of gunfire. Furthermore, a Black community boycott of John's Liquor Store launched by Bakewell caused the Korean community not only to make an effort to bring pressure on Tom Bradley, the first Black mayor of Los Angeles, as well as on Black civil rights leaders, seeking their public denunciations of the boycott. Korean Americans also formed an organization called K.A.R.E. (Korean American Race Relations Emergency Fund) in which first generation and 1.5/second generation community leaders banded together to support the Korean merchant. In the latter part of this chapter, I examine why Korean

---

<sup>1</sup> Brenda E. Stevenson, "Latasha Harlins, Soon Ja Du, and Joyce Karlin: A Case Study of Multicultural Female Violence and Justice on the Urban Frontier," *The Journal of African American History*, Vol. 89, No. 2 (Spring, 2004); Neil Gotanda, "Re-Producing the Model Minority Stereotype: Judge Joyce Karlin's Sentencing Colloquy in *People v. Soon Ja Du*," in Wendy L. Ng, eds., *Reviewing Asian America: Locating Diversity* (Pullman, Washington: Washington State University Press, 1995). For the contrasting images of Latasha Harlins and Soon Ja Du, see also Kyungjin Song, "Two Tales of an American City: Portrayal of African American and Korean American Relations in Two Ethnic Newspapers between 1991 and 1993, The *Los Angeles Sentinel* and the *Korea Times*," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 1997; Augustina Jhi-ho Chae, "To Be Almost like White: The Case of Soon Ja Du," M.A. thesis, University of Nebraska, Omaha, 2002.

leaders' strategy of mobilizing local politicians and civil rights leaders for a termination of the boycott was ineffective. Within K.A.R.E., possibilities were generated that might have had a real impact in quelling tensions, but the group was unable to overcome fractures within the leadership along generational lines. This impasse led to the dissolution of the inter-generational Korean American organization, leaving a discursive vacuum which had the significant effect of strengthening the confrontational rhetoric and tone of first generation, hard-line Korean Americans on the issue of the Black-Korean conflicts in the months leading up to the crisis of April 1992.

### Boycotts

Black-Korean conflicts did not prove to be easily contained by programs for cultural exchange and mutual understanding. The Korean community tried in vain to improve ties through various goodwill activities. Between 1987 and 1989, the tension exploded several times in the form of boycotts of Korean-owned stores. In the 1980s, Korean immigrant merchants in New York also experienced four major Black boycotts, some of which lasted more than a year. Compared with the sustained boycotts in New York, the boycotts in Los Angeles did not last long. As Patrick D. Joyce has noted, the legacy of reform politics resulted in less organized communities of political interest. The Black community in Los Angeles lacked "the capacity and will for mobilization" required to sustain a boycott over the long term. One boycott ended within just three days, and the longest did not last more than a month. In Los Angeles, the boycotts did not succeed in attracting a lot of attention from local officials, either.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, they failed

---

<sup>2</sup> Patrick D. Joyce, *No Fire Next Time: Black-Korean Conflicts and the Future of America's Cities* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 60, 122-123.

to alert the Black-Korean Alliance to the possibility of conflict escalation.

In Los Angeles, the first boycott of a Korean-owned store erupted in January 1987 about half a year after the formation of the Black-Korean Alliance. The target of the boycott was the Finest Market at 2207 West Florence Avenue. Verma Foreman, who worked at the market for three years, led the boycott, arguing that Korean shopkeeper Young Kim discriminated against Blacks. She complained that the Korean owner did not provide Blacks with management positions. She also dissuaded Black customers from patronizing the market by saying “they’ll take your money but they sure won’t hire your son.” On the first day of the boycott, about thirty residents joined Foreman in front of the store. Calling themselves “freedom fighters,” they demanded the Korean owner hire Blacks at the management level and sell meats and produce items of better quality. The Finest Market boycott ended three days after it began. The owner agreed to accept most of the demands presented by the boycotters. It should be noted, however, that their boycott was close to a fundamentally spontaneous response to the discrimination by the Korean-owned store, a process which indicated not the lack of political capacity of the boycotters but the lack of community organizations to shape the collective action.<sup>3</sup> When a reporter from the *Los Angeles Sentinel* asked Foreman “whether she would take her fervent campaign and personality to other neighborhoods and stores,” she replied, “I’ve thought about it but I really don’t know who or what the powers that be are so I wouldn’t even know where to begin.”<sup>4</sup>

In a *Los Angeles Sentinel* editorial about two months after the Finest Market boycott,

---

<sup>3</sup> Regarding the concept of spontaneity, which implies not a politically primitive or impromptu form of collective action, but a response of the collective to the absence of organization, see James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 150-151.

<sup>4</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, January 22 and 29, 1987.

Larry Aubry, a staff member of the Black-Korean Alliance, stressed mutual cooperation as a means to relieve the tension between Blacks and Koreans. He even cautioned the Black residents not to push their “luck.”<sup>5</sup> Less than two months after the editorial was published, however, the Crenshaw Swap Meet became a target of the second Black boycott. Led by Vietnam War veteran Charles Cook and some Black merchants in the Crenshaw area, it lasted eight days. The swap meet mall was blamed for refusing to rent booths to Black merchants and for “raping the Black community” by draining their meager resources. While explaining the determination of the boycott group to “end exploitation of Black people,” Cook said “we (Blacks in the group) would like to share in the loan money and other assistance Asian merchants are receiving.” The war veteran also said he tried in vain to reach several officials such as the mayor, California State Assemblywoman Maxine Waters, and City Councilwoman Pat Russell.<sup>6</sup> Failing to draw attention from local officials, the boycott had to be finally resolved by federal mediators.<sup>7</sup>

The third boycott occurred at the Village Inn Café at 3710 West Martin Luther King Boulevard. It was triggered by a trivial dispute which took place on August 20, 1988 between two young Black customers and a Korean restaurant owner who disregarded the customers’ order to double-bag French fries “dripping with oil.” Boycotters asked Blacks to stop patronizing the restaurant, chanting “[R]espect us or don’t do business in our community.” The boycott was endorsed by the Los Angeles NAACP. Executive secretary Harold Webb and publicity director Ruth Anderson of the local NAACP chapter participated in the fourth picketing of the restaurant in mid-September with Tony Wafford who was a Beverly Hills-Hollywood NAACP board

---

<sup>5</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 26, 1987.

<sup>6</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, May 14, 1987.

<sup>7</sup> Patrick D. Joyce, op. cit., 124.

member. College student Precious Lee, one of the two Black customers, sent a written statement to the mayor, City Council members, the City Attorney, the District Attorney, and Police Chief Daryl F. Gates. The same statement was sent to Deputy Chief Jesse Brewer, a member of the Black-Korean Alliance. Like veteran Charles Cook, Lee failed to attract attention from these officials.<sup>8</sup> It indicated that Los Angeles, unlike New York City, lacked “competitive pressures” from local politics and neighborhoods which would often be required for channeling tensions into organized and non-violent protest, not into unorganized violence.<sup>9</sup>

On November 18, 1989, a swap-meet mall on Slauson Avenue experienced a boycott led by a budding grassroots organization OMNI (Organization of Mutual Neighborhood Interest). Before the boycott, *Los Angeles Times* reporter Itabari Njeri met eight Black residents including two OMNI members and Ward Wesley, spokesperson for the community-based organization. Wesley was an owner of a Los Angeles janitorial service and his “authoritative manner” was strong enough to make the reporter recall Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X. At the meeting, Wesley said to the reporter that OMNI would boycott the L.A. Slauson Swapmeet, while harshly criticizing the disrespectful treatment of Black customers by Korean merchants: “When you ask if you can see the merchandise, they bark ‘No, no touch!’ They never want you to touch anything. Yes, that’s a big one, ‘Never touch! Don’t touch!’” Another Black resident added that such disrespectful treatment reminded her of White racism in Texas where she grew up: “When I was a little girl and we went to buy clothes (blacks) couldn’t try them on. It’s the same thing with the Koreans. And I’m telling you...we don’t need any new Massa’s.”<sup>10</sup>


---

<sup>8</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, September 22, 1988.

<sup>9</sup> Patrick D. Joyce, op. cit., 40 and 123.

<sup>10</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, November 8, 1989; Itabari Njeri, *The Last Plantation: Color, Conflict, and Identity: Reflections of a New World Black* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 38-39.

Figure 3: Boycott Flyer of Organization of Mutual Neighborhood Interest  
(Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, UCLA)

<b>BOYCOTT</b> WESTERN + STARSON SWAP MEET	NOV. 18, 1989 10:00 AM	<b>BOYCOTT</b>
<p>- <u>AFRICAN-AMERICAN</u> DOLLARS COUNT</p> <p>- How many times have you been <b>MISTREATED, DISRESPECTED ??</b></p> <p>- How many <u>AFRICAN-AMERICANS</u> are working in <u>KOREAN</u> owned businesses?</p> <p>- Last year <u>AFRICAN-AMERICANS</u> spent <b><u>225 BILLION DOLLARS</u></b> as consumers.</p> <p>- We demand fair treatment, respect, and for the <u>KOREAN</u> businesses to return dollars to the <u>AFRICAN-AMERICAN</u> community by hiring <u>AFRICAN-AMERICANS</u> and making contributions to community based organizations.</p>		
<b>You Can Make A Difference-BUY BLACK!!</b>		
<b>BOYCOTT</b>	P. O. Box 20348 Los Angeles, Ca. 90006 <b>213-936-0265</b>	
*FLYER FROM OMNI		



OMNI demanded fair treatment and respect from the Korean merchants. It insisted on the contribution of merchants to the Black community through the hiring of Black people. OMNI was especially critical of the refund and exchange policies of Korean-owned stores. However, the boycott ended in a mere one-day protest. Two weeks after the boycott, OMNI and the L.A. Slauson Swapmeet had a meeting to find a way to settle the issues.<sup>11</sup> For the meeting, the swap meet prepared a statement titled “We Support Our Community Where We Do Business.” In the statement, the L.A. Slauson Swapmeet emphasized that the tension could be “very easily resolved” because it was not necessarily a cultural problem but rather a merchant-customer problem. The swap meet promised to develop a customer service and complaint system to resolve the problems of refund and exchange. It also promised to provide the Korean merchants with ESL (English as a Second Language) classes and to teach them “how to conduct business using proper language.”<sup>12</sup>

Jay Lee, general manager of the swap meet, also convened a general meeting of merchants three times to emphasize the importance of customer service and respectful treatment of customers.<sup>13</sup> While the *Hankook Ilbo* praised the efforts of the Korean merchants to prevent the boycott from degenerating into more serious incidents, the ethnic media also depreciated it as an involuntary agreement extracted under pressure from the Black community.<sup>14</sup> OMNI and the swap meet met again on December 11 when the latter promised that it would hire a customer

---

<sup>11</sup> Edward T. Chang, “Building Minority Coalitions: A Case Study of Korean and African Americans,” *Korea Journal of Population and Development*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (July, 1992), 38-39; *Hankook Ilbo*, December 4, 1989.

<sup>12</sup> “We Support Our Community Where We Do Business,” December 2, 1989, folder 7, box 3691, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers.

<sup>13</sup> “Letter from Jay Lee to Ward Wesley,” December 7, 1989, folder 7, box 3691, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers.

<sup>14</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, December 4 and 8, 1989.

service representative to resolve all refund and exchange problems. Meanwhile, although the boycott became a well-known event because it was widely reported in media such as the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Hankook Ilbo*, only three Koreans participated in the meeting: Michael Yoon, president of the swap meet, Jay Lee, and Henry Kim, merchant representative of the swap meet. The Korean members of the Black-Korean Alliance did not show up at the meeting.<sup>15</sup>

In December, 1989, OMNI also boycotted the Inglewood Department Store, also owned by a Korean, demanding that the department store-style swap meet hire more Blacks. Paul Cho, president and owner, immigrated to the United States in 1977. When he was a helper at a local hamburger stand, he was shot in the left shoulder by a Black robber.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, the owner and the manager of the swap meet were cooperative enough to lead Jan Ford-Atkins, secretary of OMNI, discard her earlier negative feelings toward Korean merchants: “I had thought it was them against us. It’s not. They are trying and willing to work with people in the community...I think things can be worked out.” Unlike the L.A. Slauson Swapmeet, the Inglewood swap meet already had a Black public relations representative. It had a great interest in fostering goodwill through its community activities such as providing Black students with scholarships and donating food at Thanksgiving and Christmas to Black seniors. It also switched banks from a Korean ethnic bank to a local branch of Great American First Savings Bank. Due to its multiple goodwill gestures, it was recognized by local Chamber of Commerce officials as “an example of a community-minded business.” After being boycotted, the Inglewood swap meet also offered its eighty independent vendors educational workshops to

---

<sup>15</sup> “Community Meeting Minute,” December 11, 1989, folder 7, box 3691, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers.

<sup>16</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, July 26, 1990.

promote better relations with customers.<sup>17</sup>

### Danny Bakewell and the community policing of merchants

The post-Watts riots period witnessed the rapid development of a Black organization named the Brotherhood Crusade, a Black charity organization. It was created to promote self-help and mutual aid within the Black community in 1968 by several Black activists including Walter Bremond who, according to Bruce Michael Tyler, trained with Maulana Ron Karenga in “counter-insurgency” against radical left-wing groups in the Black community.<sup>18</sup> A guiding principle of the Brotherhood Crusade was that Blacks should rely on themselves, not government aid.<sup>19</sup> The Brotherhood Crusade put an emphasis on the issue of control by Blacks over “a tremendous wealth of resources in the Black community.” It emphasized that Blacks should “increase their exchanges with each other.” Additionally, it promoted the virtues of hard work and tried to “make the concept of work productivity an indelible imprint in the mind and souls” of Black people.<sup>20</sup>

During its early stages, which Danny Bakewell referred to as the “Penny Party Philosophy” period, the organization had to raise financial resources through a variety of

---

<sup>17</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, January 11 and May 13, 1990.

<sup>18</sup> Bruce Michael Tyler, “Black Radicalism in Southern California, 1950-1982,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1983, 333.

<sup>19</sup> Sylvester Monroe, “The Gospel of Equity,” *Time*, May 10, 1993, 54, Retrieved September 22, 2008 from Academic Search Premier Database.

<sup>20</sup> “The Brotherhood Crusade: Black United Fund Story,” in *The Brotherhood Crusade Presents an Unprecedented Display of Unity: A Testimony to the Pioneers of Black Political Leadership* (Los Angeles: The Brotherhood Crusade, 1976), 9, 20th Century Organizational Files, Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research.

fundraising activities. Three years after its inception, however, the Brotherhood Crusade was able to develop a payroll deduction system to finance its programs with the support of the mayor and City Council members.<sup>21</sup> Its original aim was to provide seed money for health, education, and welfare programs in the Black community. By 1980, however, Bakewell increasingly argued the fund should be also used to facilitate the development of Black businesses in the community.<sup>22</sup>

The Brotherhood Crusade launched a campaign called “Taking Our Community Back” (TOCB) in August 1989. It was initiated as an anti-gang and anti-drug campaign and joined by various community organizations such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference of Greater Los Angeles and the Los Angeles NAACP. Although the campaign was not successful in reaching its original goal of mobilizing a thousand residents as volunteers, it was highly praised by the *Los Angeles Sentinel*. Larry Aubry of the Black-Korean Alliance wrote in his regular column titled “Urban Perspective” that the campaign would be a turning point in the struggle of Blacks for justice and equality.<sup>23</sup> In particular, Ruth Washington, publisher of the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and wife of the late Leon H. Washington, Jr. who founded the newspaper, blessed Bakewell for his “intestinal fortitude” to reclaim their community from “the young hoodlums,” “the marauding gangs,” and “the dreaded menace of drugs.”<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Danny Bakewell, “The Brotherhood Crusade: A Conceptual Model,” *The Black Scholar*, Vol. 7, No. 6 (March, 1976), 23.

<sup>22</sup> Susan Mary Strohm, “Black Community Organization and the Role of the Black Press in Resource Mobilization in Los Angeles from 1940 to 1980,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1989, 156-158; Danny Bakewell, “President’s Perspective: ‘What You Should Know about Us,’” in *Brotherhood Crusade*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (March, 1990), folder 17, box 0307, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers.

<sup>23</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, September 21, 1989.

<sup>24</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, August 24, 1989.

More importantly, however, when the TOCB campaign entered its fourth week, the Brotherhood Crusade began a sub-campaign to police local merchants who sold drug paraphernalia and red or blue bandanas which were respectively symbols of the two Los Angeles-based gangs, the Bloods and the Crips. Chastising those merchants with a lack of respect for the Black community, Bakewell and members of the Community Protection Squads, a patrol team of the TOCB campaign, even “confiscated” such products from the merchants and burned them. By the early 1990, the scope of policing activities of the TOCB campaign was further extended by Bakewell to take the Black community back not only from gangs and drug dealers but also from the local merchants who were considered to be responsible for economic injustice: “You have people doing business in our community (who have no Black employees). If they don’t hire us, we’re going to put them out of business. Straight up. No apology necessary. And more is going to be forth coming.”<sup>25</sup>

Bakewell, often likened to Al Sharpton in New York, was one of the wealthiest Blacks in Los Angeles and had political connections with influential figures and important government agencies. With a \$3.5 million subsidy from the Community Redevelopment Agency, developer Bakewell built the Adams Vermont Shopping Center near the University of Southern California.<sup>26</sup> In Compton, a city near South Central Los Angeles where Bakewell maintained an influence over City Council members by making generous campaign contributions, he also gained considerable profit from various subsidies provided by the city government.<sup>27</sup> Possessing

---

<sup>25</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, August 31, September 14, and October 5, 1989, and January 18, 1990.

<sup>26</sup> UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education and Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, *Who Benefits from Redevelopment in Los Angeles? An Evaluation of Commercial Redevelopment Activities in the 1990s* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, 1999), 36-41, Retrieved July 1, 2011 from <http://www.communitybenefits.org/downloads/WhoBenefits.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> Mike Davis, *Dead Cities and Other Tales* (New York: The New Press, 2002), 281.

two houses in the San Gabriel foothills and Santa Barbara as well as a large ranch in Lompoc, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, Bakewell was also one of the few Blacks who enjoyed deep allegiance and credibility among Blacks on the streets of South Central Los Angeles. As Congresswoman Maxine Waters said, he symbolized a hero with “a strong voice” that the Black community members were looking for. Moreover, Bakewell was often willing to play the race card to advance his interests.<sup>28</sup> In the absence of a left and progressive political imagination, Bakewell’s radical racial rhetoric, intertwined with the languages of community control, was an effective political tool to captivate the attention of Black people and to consolidate his power on the street.

#### Local government responses

Considering Bakewell’s influential status and invincible credibility in the Black community, his inflammatory remarks about local merchants were surely to add fuel to the volatile Black-Korean tension that had already erupted into several boycotts of Korean-owned stores. However, the county government had neither the will nor the available resources to relieve the intergroup tension. Instead of addressing more fundamental social and economic problems in South Central Los Angeles, the county government pursued a strategy of managing intergroup relations and sought to understand the intergroup or interracial tensions in terms of interpersonal disputes. In particular, the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations, a county government agency primarily responsible for dealing with race-related issues, concentrated its efforts on mobilizing the elite groups in each community, on ameliorating

---

<sup>28</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, October 20, 1991.

symptoms of conflict, and on doing research in race-related problems and educating the public through commission hearings and reports of them.<sup>29</sup>

To make matters worse, the county commission did not have human resources adequate to address the tensions. In the early 1970s, the county commission had one hundred staff members. Due to the conservative antipathy toward spending on social programs, however, the number of its staff members significantly decreased to sixty-five in 1975 and to thirty-four in 1978. In the late 1980s and early 1990s when the Black-Korean tension was worsening, the county commission had only twenty staff members, including sixteen consultants. The commission's annual budget was also too meager to address effectively the intergroup tension. In 1986, the county commission could spend \$975,000 for its various social programs. Its budget increased to \$1.3 million by 1990. According to Eugene Mornell, executive director of the commission, however, this amount of budget accounted for "only 1/70th of 1% of the county budget."<sup>30</sup>

The city government was no more effective in alleviating Black-Korean tension in Los Angeles. The Bradley administration did not actively intervene. Instead, it relied on strategies of training community mediators and educating Korean merchants through a couple of programs developed by the Los Angeles City Human Relations Commission. In particular, Jan Jung-Min Sunoo, the elder son of Harold Hakwon Sunoo, a lifelong advocate for democracy and reunification of Korea, was deeply involved in these education and training programs both as a

---

<sup>29</sup> Paul Ong, Kyeyoung Park, and Yasmin Tong, "The Korean-Black Conflict and the State," in Paul Ong, Edna Bonacich, and Lucie Cheng, eds., *The New Asian Immigration in Los Angeles and Global Restructuring* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 282.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 283; Yasmin Theresa Tong, "In the Middle: Mediating Black-Korean Conflict in South Central Los Angeles," M.A. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1992, 30-31; *Los Angeles Times*, November 9, 1986 and January 2, 1990.

labor mediator of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS) and as a Human Relations commissioner. Immediately after the end of OMNI's boycott of the L.A. Slauson Swapmeet, Jan Sunoo suggested the establishment of a Neighborhood Conciliation and Intercultural Center to Mayor Bradley, maintaining that techniques of mediation and conflict resolution could be utilized to prevent the escalation of intergroup tension.<sup>31</sup>

With strong faith in the languages of dispute resolution, Sunoo also organized the Intercultural Mediation Symposium on March 27, 1990 with the assistance of the FMCS. This symposium was held to train voluntary and professional community mediators for the settlement of disputes between Blacks and Koreans. Approximately one hundred participants attended lectures by the federal agency on strategies for mediating intercultural disputes.<sup>32</sup> Jan Sunoo also initiated an instructional project of the city human relations commission to develop the "Korean American Merchant Video" before being appointed by Mayor Bradley in September, 1990 as president of the Los Angeles City Human Relations Commission, a project designed to educate Korean merchants to "become better businessmen" upon the premise that intergroup tension "could have been avoided had Koreans been better prepared to do business in minority communities."<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Jan Sunoo, "Conceptual Proposal: Neighborhood Conciliation and Intercultural Center," December 19, 1989, folder 7, box 3691, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers.

<sup>32</sup> "News Release: LA City Human Relations Commission Begins Education and Training Program to Reduce Intercultural Conflicts," March 27, 1990; "Memorandum: Briefing on First Intercultural Mediation Symposium," April 5, 1990, file HR/00 O037e-0010, box D-1296, The Los Angeles City Records Center and Archives.

<sup>33</sup> "Meeting Minutes of the Conflict Resolution Committee," February 15, 1990, file HR/00 O037e-0010, box D-1296, The Los Angeles City Records Center and Archives; "3rd Draft of Korean American Merchant Video," November, 1990, 2, file HR/00 P037e-002, box D-1295, The Los Angeles City Records Center and Archives. The instructional video, tentatively titled "Korean Merchants in African-American Neighborhoods: A Guide to Better Customer Relations," was supposed to have been released in the summer of 1992. See *Hankook Ilbo*, January 25, 1992.



### The shooting death of Latasha Harlins

After viewing a video presentation titled “I’m not prejudiced, but” on racial stereotypes in Philadelphia at the Intercultural Mediation Symposium organized by Sunoo, Ward Wesley of OMNI said “I feel we are sitting on a keg of dynamite,” drawing a parallel between Philadelphia and Los Angeles.<sup>34</sup> Twelve months after the presentation and two weeks after an event in which a Black male named Rodney King was brutally beaten by four White male Los Angeles police officers, a tragic incident that would function as one of the fuses to ignite the dynamite keg in the spring of 1992 occurred during a scuffle over a \$1.79 bottle of orange juice at the Empire Liquor Market Deli on South Figueroa Street in South Central Los Angeles.

Latasha Harlins, a Black teenage girl, entered the liquor outlet on Saturday, March 16, 1991 and took a bottle of orange juice from the refrigerator in the store. She put it in her backpack and approached the store counter. Thirteen-year-old Lakeshia Combs and her nine-year-old brother Ismail Ali were also in the store. They later testified that Harlins tried to pay for the orange juice. However, middle-aged, naturalized Korean shopkeeper Soon Ja Du, who immigrated to the United States in 1976, the year Harlins was born, believed that Harlins was trying to steal the juice. According to Du, when she asked Harlins to pay for the juice, Harlins said “what orange juice?” As the teenager came close to the counter, Du grabbed her sweater to pull the juice from the backpack. This was followed by a scuffle during which Harlins punched Du in the eye several times. Du thought she would die if Harlins hit her again. She hurled a stool from behind the counter but it did not hit Harlins. Then Du took a holstered .38 special caliber revolver from under the counter. According to a police officer of the Scientific Investigation

---

<sup>34</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, March 29, 1990.

Division of the LAPD, the handgun had been “tampered” with in such a way that the trigger could be easily pulled with very little pressure. While Du was trying to take the revolver out of the holster, Harlins picked up the bottle of orange juice to place it on the counter. As Harlins turned toward the store front entrance to leave, a bullet was fired from a distance of three to four feet. Harlins died instantly. Two one-dollar bills lay on the floor next to her left hand.<sup>35</sup>

Although the Black community was greatly shocked by the shooting death, some Black people thought that they didn’t need to directly protest against the Du family’s shuttered store. In particular, an editorial of the *Los Angeles Sentinel* argued that Black people trust in the judicial process because the killing was a “smoking gun” case which was recorded on a security camera in the Empire Liquor market.<sup>36</sup> However, *Los Angeles Times* reporter Bill Boyarsky, who had experience covering the Watts riots as an Associated Press dispatcher, was able to find that the same complaints about disrespectful merchants during the long hot summer of 1965 were “being voiced in South L.A., more than a quarter-century later” when he learned of the killing of Black teenager by the Korean merchant. Though the killing of Harlins was unrelated to the beating of Rodney King, according to the veteran journalist, these two incidents provided Black people with “a focus for long-simmering feelings of neglect.” By saying that the two incidents tied “in indirectly,” Larry Aubry of the Black-Korean Alliance confirmed Boyarsky’s intuitive conviction.

---

<sup>35</sup> Court Reporter’s Transcript of Grand Jury Proceedings, The Grand Jury of the County of Los Angeles, State of California, *The People of the State of California, Plaintiff vs. Soon Ja Du, Defendant*, Case No. BA 037738, April 24, 1991, 10, 22, 46, 50-55, Los Angeles County Records Center; Court Reporter’s Daily Transcript of the Proceedings, Superior Court of the State of California for the County of Los Angeles, Department No. 111, Hon. Joyce A. Karlin, Judge, *The People of the State of California, Plaintiff, vs. Soon Ja Du, Defendant*, Case No. BA 037738 (hereafter *People v. Soon Ja Du*), Vol. 2, October 1, 1991, 156 and 227; *People v. Soon Ja Du*, Vol. 3, October 2, 1991, 326-333, 350-351, Los Angeles County Records Center; *People v. Superior Court (Du)*, Case No. B063918, 5 Cal. App. 4th 822, April 21, 1992. See especially 825-828. In obtaining a copy of transcripts of the Soon Ja Du trial, I am greatly indebted to UCLA historian Brenda E. Stevenson and Los Angeles County Deputy District Attorney Roxane Carvajal.

<sup>36</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 28, 1991.

Boyarsky was also able to see these two tragic events were intimately tied together “in a single expression of outrage” at candidate forums for the upcoming City Council election in predominantly Black districts.<sup>37</sup>

To defuse the volatile situation, the Mayor’s Office organized a meeting of Black and Korean community leaders three days later. Jan Jung-Min Sunoo, then president of the Los Angeles City Human Relations Commission, chaired the meeting. Sunoo well knew what the shooting death of Black teenage girl by the Korean merchant meant for the tension-laden relations between the two communities. At the meeting, Black and Korean leaders agreed to take several short- and long-term steps to prevent an escalation of intergroup tension. They also tried to lessen the racial implications of the shooting death by framing it as a violent tragedy that had taken place between a customer and a merchant. In a statement issued on the same day, the community leaders said that the “senseless loss” of Harlins’s life was “the worst type of violence perpetrated upon a consumer by a merchant,” expressing their concerns about the possibility that the Black-Korean relations could be aggravated by the shooting death.<sup>38</sup>

The Mayor’s Office also invited Danny Bakewell of the Brotherhood Crusade to join a coalition of leaders from the two communities. Bakewell declined.<sup>39</sup> Instead, he established the Brotherhood Crusade Mothers in Action (BCMIA) to drive “undesirable merchants” out of the Black community and repurchase their stores “on behalf of the ‘people.’” It was formed to send a

---

<sup>37</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, March 27, 1991.

<sup>38</sup> Julie Tugend, “To Mayor Bradley via Mark Fabiani: Update on Black/Korean Tensions Following Empire Liquor Store Shooting,” March 21, 1991, folder 4, box 4253, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers; “Statement of African American and Korean American Community Leaders on the Death of Latasha Harlins,” March 19, 1991, folder 13, box 3690, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers. The statement was also published on a Korean ethnic media. See *Korea Times*, March 27, 1991.

<sup>39</sup> Julie Tugend, “To Mayor Bradley via Mark Fabiani: Update on Black/Korean Tensions Following Empire Liquor Store Shooting.”

warning to merchants whom they considered to be “raping” the Black community’s “profits and pride.”<sup>40</sup> The BCMIA appealed to mothers by emphasizing the shooting death as a killing of a child by an adult. Members of the BCMIA chanted “Stop killing our children” in front of the Empire Liquor market while vowing that the store would never reopen.<sup>41</sup> The sign “Closed for Murder & Disrespect of Black People” on butcher paper taped across the entrance of the Empire Liquor market was an angry articulation of such motherhood. Progressive liberal politician Mark Ridley-Thomas, then the 8th City Council district candidate, also defined Harlins’s death as the killing of “an adolescent consumer” by “an adult merchant” and even promised to donate \$5,000 to the Community Economic Development Fund newly established by Bakewell to inspire the Black community to be “economically self-sufficient” so that other ethnicities would not have the opportunity to mistreat and disrespect Black customers.<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile, immediately after the shooting incident, many Korean immigrants attempted to disidentify with Soon Ja Du to prevent the killing from escalating into a racial and community issue. They argued that the killing was an isolated incident with no relationship to the Korean community as a whole. Yang Il Kim, president of the National Korean American Grocers Association, said that Du’s “personal way to do business” was responsible for the shooting death, hoping that the killing should not be exploited in a political way.<sup>43</sup> According to briefing reports

---

<sup>40</sup> The Brotherhood Crusade, “Brotherhood Crusade Mothers in Action Say: No Respect...No Business in Our Community!” March 27, 1991, folder 27, box 4247, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers.

<sup>41</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 28, 1991.

<sup>42</sup> Campaign Headquarters of Mark Ridley-Thomas for City Council, “A Call for a Merchant/Consumer Code of Ethics,” March 21, 1991, folder 22, box 4247, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers; *Los Angeles Sentinel*, April 4, 1991. According to an article appeared on the *Hankook Ilbo*, Mark Ridley-Thomas received the same amount of money as a campaign donation from the Korean community including an association of Korean grocers and liquor retailers. See *Hankook Ilbo*, March 30, 1991.

<sup>43</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, April 6, 1991; *Los Angeles Times*, March 22, 1991.

for Mayor Bradley produced by Yoon Hee Kim, special advisor to the mayor, Korean community leaders were greatly concerned that the killing could be developed by “extremists and opportunists” into something similar to the year-long boycott of two Korean grocery stores in the Flatbush neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. Some expressed that the Korean community was not responsible for the incident, nor did it need to apologize, because the killing was an “isolated incident by one woman.”<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, however, Soon Ja Du increasingly became a symbol of pain that Korean merchants were suffering in South Central Los Angeles. In particular, as Karen Umemoto noted, the *Hankook Ilbo* represented her as “an archetypal Korean merchant” who had been harassed by local gang members. The Korean ethnic newspaper also placed Du within the narrative of the American Dream. For Korean immigrants, she personified the deferral of the dream. Through such representations by the ethnic media, more and more Korean immigrants identified with Du. One Korean American who lived in Harbor City, Los Angeles even suggested the establishment of a legal defense fund for the Du family, complaining that there had been no outcry in the Black community against the many robberies and murders of Korean merchants.<sup>45</sup>

### Deracialization of the shooting

As the Black community tried to emphasize racial aspects of Harlins’s death, the Korean

---

<sup>44</sup> Yoon Hee Kim, “Briefing Report on the Liquor Store Shooting Death of Latasha Harlins,” March 20, 1991; idem, “Briefing Points for Mayor’s Meeting with African American and Korean American Leaders,” March 25, 1991, folder 13, box 3690, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers.

<sup>45</sup> Karen Umemoto, “Blacks and Koreans in Los Angeles: The Case of LaTasha Harlins and Soon Ja Du,” in James Jennings, ed., *Blacks, Latinos, and Asians in Urban America: Status and Prospects for Politics and Activism* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1994), 101, 107; *Korea Times*, April 3, 1991. It was conservatively estimated by Yang Il Kim that at least thirty eight Korean merchants had been killed across the nation since 1975. See *Korea Times*, April 3, 1991.

community on the contrary made an effort to deemphasize the racial implications of the shooting incident.<sup>46</sup> Larry Aubry of the Black-Korean Alliance wrote in his regular column that the incident had “clear racial implications,” regardless of Du’s motivations. He added, echoing Boyarsky’s words, that Black people considered the death of Harlins and the beating of Rodney King as “the latest assaults on a community already under siege.”<sup>47</sup> Against such an emphasis upon a racial frame, the Korean community insisted that there were neither racial motivations for the shooting nor racial remarks between Harlins and Du during the scuffle, quoting police descriptions to portray the incident as a “business dispute.”<sup>48</sup> As relations between Blacks and Koreans worsened following the death of Harlins, Jan Jung-Min Sunoo and Roderick Wright, one of the candidates for the 8th City Council district, also tried to deracialize the shooting death by emphasizing cultural differences and a lack of communication as reasons for the tragedy.<sup>49</sup> Interestingly, the Black-Korean Alliance deracialized the shooting incident at times as “a tragic event caused by lack of mutual understanding” between two communities, implicitly acknowledging race and prejudice, while at others characterizing the problem as, in essence, a merchant-customer dispute. To discipline Korean merchants in their interactions with customers, the Black-Korean Alliance even proposed to develop “a Merchant-Consumer Code of Ethics” which was to have been posted inside each store.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Kyungjin Song, “Two Tales of an American City: Portrayal of African American and Korean American Relations in Two Ethnic Newspapers between 1991 and 1993, The *Los Angeles Sentinel* and the *Korea Times*,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 1997, 175.

<sup>47</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, April 4, 1991.

<sup>48</sup> *Korea Times*, March 27, 1991; *Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 1991.

<sup>49</sup> *Korea Times*, March 27, 1991.

<sup>50</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, April 5, 1991; Los Angeles Black-Korean Alliance, “Message to Our Community,” May 14, 1991, folder 5, box 4248, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers.

Some Korean immigrants accused the police of intentionally pitting the Black community against the Korean community. They maintained that the police had gotten into trouble when the Rodney King beating was caught on videotape and had “manipulated” the shooting of Harlins to “divert public attention” away from the beating case.<sup>51</sup> A press conference held by the police two days after the incident led many Korean immigrants to believe in such police manipulation. According to the police, the conference was held to dispel rumors circulating in the Black community that Du had kicked the body of the deceased and that she was injured from a beating by her husband, Billy H. Du, after the shooting, rather than by Harlins herself during the scuffle. Most of all, the conference was designed to quell a rumor that the killing was racially motivated.<sup>52</sup>

However, the press conference ended up incurring resentment from both sides. Ahneva Harlins, Latasha Harlins’ aunt, angrily insisted that her niece was shot to death in a confrontation caused by the disrespectful treatment of Blacks by Korean merchants, refuting LAPD Commander Michael J. Bostic’s explanation that there was no racial motivation for the shooting. On the other hand, Bostic also stated that “the video shows only ‘a scuffle’ begun by Du over the knapsack, not an attack mounted by the teenager” and emphasized that Harlins did not attempt to steal the orange juice.<sup>53</sup> Bostic’s crime incident narrative suggested that the shooting could not be justified as self-defense. Soon Ja Du’s son Joseph Du angrily impeached Commander Bostic’s

---

<sup>51</sup> Yoon Hee Kim, “Briefing Report on the Liquor Store Shooting Death of Latasha Harlins,” March 20, 1991, folder 13, box 3690, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers.

<sup>52</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 1991. On the rumors, see also a minutes of meeting of two LAPD officers, Julie Tugend of the Mayor’s Office, and Ron Wakabayashi, executive director of the Los Angeles City Human Relations Commission in the 8th district Councilman Robert Farrell’s office, March 20, 1991, file HR/00 P037e-002, box D-1295, The Los Angeles City Records Center and Archives.

<sup>53</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 1991.

motives, arguing that the police was using her mother as a scapegoat to turn public attention away from the beating of Rodney King. The Du family also attempted to refute the police account by insisting that Harlins brutally hit Du not only with her fist but also with the orange juice container to such an extent that Du had no choice but to fire the gun in order to save her life. Du's defense attorney Bong Joon Park, who had briefly taken the case before the Du family brought it to Black attorney Charles Lloyd, also contributed to the spread of the police manipulation story by suggesting that the police edited the video against Du.<sup>54</sup>

In the meanwhile, some Korean Americans denounced the media for sensationalizing the incident by casting it in the framework of Black-Korean conflict.<sup>55</sup> Of course, there were a few Korean Americans who maintained that Korean community leaders were able to contain the discourse around the shooting incident from even greater media sensationalism. For example, at a community forum held by the Korean American Coalition on April 4, 1991, Edward T. Chang said that the intergroup relationship in Los Angeles was not exacerbated by the shooting death of Harlins because an articulation of opinions which existed in the two communities had been controlled by the Black-Korean Alliance before they were reported by the media. He added that Black-Korean relations in New York City were sensationalized and aggravated by the media which pitted the two groups against each other, due to the lack of such an intergroup alliance.<sup>56</sup> Contrary to Chang's optimistic diagnosis, however, Los Angeles media institutions were largely

---

<sup>54</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, March 20, 1991; *Korea Times*, March 27, 1991.

<sup>55</sup> See Hae Won Park's unfinished dissertation tentatively titled "The Harlins/Du Story: 'Race' as Marker in the Rhetorical Construction of Reality" which tried to examine media representation of the shooting incident. Quote from page 88. Park's unfinished dissertation was attached to Kathy Sung-Ah Kwon's master thesis, "The Case of Latasha Harlins and Soon Ja Du: A Critical Intervention in the Mediated Politics of Racialized Representations," California State University, Northridge, 1997.

<sup>56</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, April 6, 1991; *Korea Times*, April 17, 1991.



castigated by the Korean community for “irresponsible,” “inflammatory,” and “race-mongering” journalism.<sup>57</sup> Korean American veteran journalist Kyung Won Lee, a founding father of Korean American journalism, was the toughest critic of the media. He harshly criticized the media for “pouring gasoline” on the combustible intergroup relationship. He fulminated against the media by defining it as “vultures” that had profited from turning the “isolated” shooting incident into “screaming racial headlines and soundbites.”<sup>58</sup>

Korean Americans also blamed the Los Angeles media for racializing naturalized U.S. citizen Soon Ja Du as a ruthless and greedy foreign-born merchant, while they appeared to be content with representations of Korean immigrant merchants in the New York media when some of the New York Korean merchants were being boycotted by Blacks in the late 1980s and early 1990s. As Pyung Gap Min and Edward T. Chang pointed out, major media in New York City, except the *Amsterdam News*, were sympathetic toward the New York Korean community during the boycotts. The New York media represented Korean immigrants as an innocent, diligent, and hardworking model-minority group and delegitimized the boycotts by describing Black boycott leaders as an opportunistic and hate-mongering racist group. Korean community leaders in New York City were generally satisfied with such representations. In Los Angeles, however, they found the mainstream media taking a different approach to the representation of Black-Korean relations. Compared with boycott leader Sonny Carson of the December 12th Movement in New York City, it has been argued, Danny Bakewell of the Brotherhood Crusade was favorably depicted by the Los Angeles media. Unlike the New York Korean merchants, Korean American scholars have also insisted that the Los Angeles Korean merchants were often portrayed as an

---

<sup>57</sup> *Korea Times*, March 27, April 3, and April 17, 1991.

<sup>58</sup> *Korea Times*, March 27 and June 2, 1991.

aggressive and disrespectful group.<sup>59</sup>

Immediately after the shooting death of Harlins, as Earl Ofari Hutchinson has rightly discerned, Black leaders tended to satisfy media's "insatiable appetite for sensationalism" by making "calculated" remarks to evoke rage among Black people. For this reason, Hae Won Park denounced the *Los Angeles Times* as "a vehicle for a faction of the Black community."<sup>60</sup> Edward T. Chang, who had said immediately after the shooting incident that the intergroup relations were not aggravated by the media due to the efforts of the Black-Korean Alliance, also later argued that the *Los Angeles Times* contributed to the exacerbation of anti-Korean sentiment by negatively portraying Soon Ja Du.<sup>61</sup>

It should be noted, however, that media representations of the relations between Blacks and Koreans in Los Angeles were not monolithic at all. For example, the *Los Angeles Times* provided a somewhat balanced account by introducing Joseph Du's comments that his family had suffered numerous thefts and robberies and that Soon Ja Du believed Harlins was attempting to rob the store.<sup>62</sup> Although Edward T. Chang insisted that a *Los Angeles Times* editorial titled "A Senseless and Tragic Killing," appeared four days after Harlins' death, was "excoriating" and

---

<sup>59</sup> Pyong Gap Min, *Caught in the Middle: Korean Communities in New York and Los Angeles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 107. See also Edward T. Chang, "African American Boycotts of Korean-Owned Stores in New York and Los Angeles," in Paul R. Brass, ed., *Riots and Pogroms* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 240-246; Edward T. Chang and Jeannette Diaz-Veizades, *Ethnic Peace in the American City: Building Community in Los Angeles and Beyond* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 69-74.

<sup>60</sup> Earl Ofari Hutchinson, "Fighting the Wrong Enemy," *The Nation*, November 4, 1991, 555; Hae Won Park, "Appendix: Hae Won Park's Dissertation," in Kathy Sung-Ah Kwon, "The Case of Latasha Harlins and Soon Ja Du: A Critical Intervention in the Mediated Politics of Racialized Representations," M.A. thesis, California State University, Northridge, 1997. Quote from page 88 of Hae Won Park's work.

<sup>61</sup> Edward T. Chang, "African American Boycotts of Korean-Owned Stores in New York and Los Angeles," 243; Edward T. Chang and Jeannette Diaz-Veizades, op. cit., 72.

<sup>62</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, March 19 and March 20, 1991.

“accusatory” against Du, the overall tone was rather to emphasize that the effort to ease the Black-Korean tension should not be interrupted by the shooting incident.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, the *Los Angeles Times* even admonished the Black community for its inflammatory and fierce rhetoric such as “Closed for Murder & Disrespect of Black People” and “Burn this mother down!” in an editorial published one week after the incident: “Given the volatile climate, the inflammatory rhetoric must not overshadow the importance of continued dialogue”<sup>64</sup>

In spite of the ambivalent media representations of the Black-Korean relations, many in the Korean immigrant community maintained a suspicion that the White-dominated mainstream media of Los Angeles intentionally encouraged Black boycott leaders to divert the Black antagonism against White society into antagonism against a minority community.<sup>65</sup> These languages later led political scientist Sumi K. Cho to insist that the Korean community was utilized both as an object for the transfer of guilt and as a vehicle for the soothing of conscience by White journalists who were overcome with guilt because of the Rodney King beating by White police officers. In the same vein, Kyung Won Lee also surmised that there was a kind of symbiotic relationship between Danny Bakewell and the “guilt-ridden” White media “in the escalating Korean bashing.”<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> Edward T. Chang, “African American Boycotts of Korean-Owned Stores in New York and Los Angeles,” 243; Edward T. Chang and Jeannette Diaz-Veizades, op. cit., 72.

<sup>64</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, March 23, 1991.

<sup>65</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, March 30, 1991.

<sup>66</sup> Sumi K. Cho, “Korean Americans vs. African Americans: Conflict and Construction,” in Robert Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 204; Kyung Won Lee, “Urban Impressionist,” in Elaine H. Kim and Eui-Young Yu, eds., *East to America: Korean American Life Stories* (New York: The New Press, 1996), 17; idem, “Legacy of *Sa-ee-gu*: Goodbye *Hahn*, Good Morning, Community Conscience,” *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (1999), 48-50.

## Rearticulating the master's language

Yet the Harlins-Du incident was not as popular a topic in media coverage as the Rodney King beating by White police officers. For one hundred days between March 17 and June 24, 1991, the *Los Angeles Times* produced fifteen pieces about Soon Ja Du or Harlins, including letters to the editorial desk. During the same span of time, at least one hundred seventy-eight articles or letters about Rodney King appeared in the newspaper.<sup>67</sup> It is evident that the shooting event took a back seat to the beating case in the *Los Angeles Times*. According to a study by Augustina Jhi-ho Chae, the Harlins-Du incident was deprioritized to an even greater extent in the pages of the weekly *Los Angeles Sentinel*, which devoted its limited space to the beating of Rodney King. On the contrary, however, the Harlins-Du incident was extensively covered by the *Hankook Ilbo* and its English stablemate the *Korea Times* to such an extent that they produced more than three hundred articles about the shooting death from March 18, 1991 through March 16, 1992.<sup>68</sup>

The Korean-language media in the United States functioned as an ethnic public sphere in which, as Kathy Sung-Ah Kwon has pointed out, Korean immigrants tried to “subvert the passive/silent/non-confrontational stereotypes” of themselves by expressing their own opinions

---

<sup>67</sup> ProQuest database of the *Los Angeles Times* accessed July 21, 2011 through the Los Angeles Public Library Databases. If we extend the date range to one year between March 17, 1991 and March 16, 1992, we can find that a total of sixty-nine articles or letters about Soon Ja Du appeared in the newspaper. Approximately 70% of them were published after November 15, 1991 when Du was convicted of voluntary manslaughter but received a suspended ten-year sentence from Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Joyce A. Karlin. During the same period, the *Los Angeles Times* produced three hundred seven articles or letters about Rodney King. Meanwhile, for a good example of media sensationalism, see the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas case in the fall of 1991. For just ten days from October 7 when Anita Hill called a press conference to October 16, the day after Clarence Thomas was confirmed as a justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, the *Los Angeles Times* mentioned Anita Hill in at least sixty-eight articles or letters.

<sup>68</sup> Augustina Jhi-ho Chae, “To Be Almost like White: The Case of Soon Ja Du,” M.A. thesis, University of Nebraska, Omaha, 2002, 134.

and voices which were denied articulation by the mainstream media. However, as Kwon admitted, such a sphere was also a space in which the dominant ideologies and the relations of power were reproduced.<sup>69</sup> To draw from the words of Audre Lorde in “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” Korean immigrants were rearticulating the master’s language of race and racial hierarchy in hopes of resisting the master’s representations of themselves. In challenging their own racialization within the master’s house, which blamed Korean merchants, symbolized by Soon Ja Du, for being disrespectful, greedy, and cold-blooded, Koreans engaging in public discourse through the ethnic press all too often took up the master’s tools, by which certain social and cultural meanings purportedly based on morality and biology were ascribed to Blacks. Such a rearticulation of the master’s languages shows that although Jim Crow racism seemed to be replaced by color-blind or new racism emphasizing cultural differences, as Étienne Balibar contends, “the *return of the biological theme* is permitted.”<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, it indicates how deeply Korean immigrants internalized the dominant racial ideologies in the United States.

It should be noted that this process of internalization of American racism began well before immigration. Korean immigrants arrived in the United States with a vast reservoir of racist imagery regarding Black people. The root of Koreans’ prejudices against Blacks could be traced back to some Korean intellectuals of the late nineteenth century. For example, Yun Ch’iho and Sŏ Chaep’il, both of whom had experiences studying in the United States, tried to prove that Koreans were a superior race tied to the Aryan race. In their Korean language newspaper *Tongnip*

---

<sup>69</sup> Kathy Sung-Ah Kwon, “The Case of Latasha Harlins and Soon Ja Du: A Critical Intervention in the Mediated Politics of Racialized Representations,” M.A. thesis, California State University, Northridge, 1997, 92-93.

<sup>70</sup> Étienne Balibar, “Is There a ‘Neo-Racism’?” in Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, eds., *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991), 26.

*Sinmun* [*The Independent*], which was published from 1896 to 1898 and widely read in Korea, Yun and Sō introduced without modification racial discourse that was dominant in the United States in their day, which was grounded in a blatant racial hierarchy: “The Blacks are dark-skinned. Their hair is curly like the hair of a sheep, their chin protruding, and their nose flat. They are generally even more stupid than the Oriental race (*tongyang injong*), and much more despicable than the White race. The autochthonous race (*t’ojong*) in the USA (...) is even less civilized than the Oriental race. (...). Today, the White race is the most clever, diligent, and brave among all the races in the world.”<sup>71</sup> After Korea’s independence from Japanese colonial rule in 1945, the United States became the dominant political and economic power in Korea, and the most influential foreign culture. The transnational migration of American racism to Korea in this period definitively entrenched Koreans’ adoption of racist attitudes toward Blacks. In particular, American movies and shows televised through American Forces Korea Network (AFKN) as well as Korean broadcasting networks functioned as a major route for importing White racism into Korea.<sup>72</sup>

Immediately after the shooting incident, Soon Ja Du and her family members racialized Latasha Harlins by circulating a “robber story” among reporters of the Korean ethnic media.<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> Quote from the partial translation by Vladimir Tikhonov with minor modifications. See Vladimir Tikhonov, “World is a Battlefield: Social Darwinism as the New World Model of Korean Intelligentsia of the 1900s,” *Bochumer Jahrbuch zur Ostasienforschung*, Vol. 27 (2003), 86. See also Noja Park (Vladimir Tikhonov’s Korean name), “Han’gukchōk Kūndae Mandŭlgi I [The Making of Korean-style Modernity: Part One],” *Inmul kwa Sasang* [*Persons and Thoughts*], Vol. 45 (January, 2002), 170.

<sup>72</sup> See Nancy Abelmann and John Lie, *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 150. On the racial segregation within the U.S. military forces in Korea and the mimicry of White racial attitudes by Koreans, see Nadia Kim, “The Migration of White Racism to South Korea,” Conference Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Boston, MA, August 1-4, 2008, 11-12, Retrieved April 6, 2009 from SocINDEX with Full Text; Katharine H. S. Moon, *Sex among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 35, 71.

<sup>73</sup> Augustina Jhi-ho Chae, *op. cit.*, 115.

They criminalized Harlins by insisting that she, after looking around for a while in the Du family's market, hit Du with her fist to steal money from the store. In a county jail, Soon Ja Du told her family that Harlins tried to steal a bottle of orange juice. According to Du's explanation, Harlins also attempted to steal money from a cash register and, after being deterred by Du, hit her in the face with her fist and the juice container. The *Hankook Ilbo* contributed to a spread of the robber story by publishing articles on how to respond to crime and to manage firearms. In an interview with the *Hankook Ilbo*, Du's attorney Charles Lloyd also sensationalized Harlins as a robber lady who attempted to reach the cash register.<sup>74</sup>

The robber story was increasingly regarded by Korean immigrants as fact because many store owners had suffered violent attacks and robberies in which the perpetrators were Black. An auto-parts store owned by a Korean in South Central Los Angeles was held up by three Blacks armed with pistols five days after the Harlins-Du incident. On April 8, six Blacks armed with Uzi submachine guns and hammers robbed a Korean swap meet. Two days later in Koreatown, a Korean liquor-store owner was harassed and battered by a Black customer. On April 15 in South Central Los Angeles, a Korean liquor store suffered an arson attack. Less than one week after the arson, a Korean woman was shot in a gunfight between two rival Black gangs in her liquor outlet in San Bernardino. After lying near death for ten days, she finally died on April 29. In the parking lot of a Korean bank, a Korean market owner was battered and robbed by a Black assailant on April 25. In San Bernardino, a Korean merchant was also robbed and shot by five Blacks including Ronnie Newt, a singer of an R&B trio called the Newtrons. On Saturday of Memorial Day weekend, two Korean employees of the KNS liquor outlet were killed by a Black man in his early thirties who also stole one hundred dollars from the store.<sup>75</sup> All these tragic

---

<sup>74</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, March 18, March 19, March 20, and May 17, 1991.

<sup>75</sup> The robber story is still widely accepted as a fact by many Korean Americans. For example, an article

incidents fortified the credibility of the robber story.

Table 2: Reported Attacks and Robberies from Blacks, Los Angeles City and the Surrounding Neighborhoods, March-May, 1991

Date (1991)	Store (Location)	Incident and Outcome
March 21	Autoglass (South Central Los Angeles)	Robbery; Two Blacks shot and arrested
April 8	King Swap meet (near Koreatown)	Robbery; One Korean shot and injured
April 10	VSQ Liquor Store (Koreatown)	Harassment and Battery
April 15	T & J Market (South Central Los Angeles)	Arson
April 19	Bliss Liquor Store (San Bernardino)	One Korean woman shot to death in a gunfight between Black gangs
April 25	Seoul Bank of California (Koreatown)	Robbery; One Black arrested
May 1	Mini Mart (San Bernardino)	Robbery; One Black shot to death by a store owner's return fire
May 25	KNS Liquor Store (Downtown Los Angeles)	Robbery; Two Koreans shot to death

Source: *Korea Times*, March 23, April 9, April 11, April 18, April 25, April 27, May 3, and May 28, 1991.

While Harlins was criminalized, as Brenda E. Stevenson has analyzed, Soon Ja Du was represented as an innocent, credible, and domesticated woman who never committed a crime. Du, an elite woman who graduated from a four-year college in Seoul and married an officer in the Korean army, had never worked before coming to the United States. After migrating to Los Angeles at the age of 39, however, the full-time housewife had to engage in manual labor for the survival of her family. Even after her husband, Billy, was able to start a convenience-store

---

summarizing a conversation between Edward T. Chang and Dong-Suk Kim, executive director of the Korean American Voters' Council of New York and New Jersey, reported that Harlins had attempted to steal the orange juice before she was shot to death. See Chaeoe Tongp'o Sinmun [*Overseas Korean Weekly*], May 4, 2007, Retrieved July 27, 2011 from <http://www.dongponews.net/news/articleView.html?idxno=10169#>.



business in the San Fernando Valley, she had to continue to work for their family business.<sup>76</sup> As some Korean American scholars have explained, most Korean immigrant working wives initiate a realignment of gender relations as they increasingly share the breadwinner role with their husbands. Although they don't explicitly protest against patriarchal marital hierarchy, they dedomesticate themselves to varying degrees by developing a new gender consciousness tied to their economic contributions to their families.<sup>77</sup>

Nevertheless, disproportionate attention was paid to Soon Ja Du's domesticity, womanhood, and motherhood. For example, at an arraignment in Compton Municipal Court on March 26, Charles Lloyd highlighted her domesticity by saying that Du was a good mother of a family composed of a husband, two sons and a daughter. During the arraignment, Deputy District Attorney Roxane Carvajal opposed to releasing Du on a bail, arguing that Du might attempt to flee to her native country. However, Lloyd succeeded in convincing the court to release Du on \$250,000 bail by emphasizing that she was a middle-aged woman of good character who had been living with her family in Mission Hills, a suburban, middle-class community in the San Fernando Valley. Du's domesticity was much more reinforced during her trial at the Los Angeles County Superior Court by Judge Joyce A. Karlin who was significantly impressed by Du's self-sacrificing motherhood.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> Brenda E. Stevenson, "Latasha Harlins, Soon Ja Du, and Joyce Karlin: A Case Study of Multicultural Female Violence and Justice on the Urban Frontier," *The Journal of African American History*, Vol. 89, No. 2 (Spring, 2004), 156-157.

<sup>77</sup> In-Sook Lim, "Korean Immigrant Women's Challenge to Gender Inequality at Home: The Interplay of Economic Resources, Gender, and Family," *Gender and Society*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1997), 49. See also Kyeyoung Park, *The Korean American Dream: Immigrants and Small Business in New York City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 113-138.

<sup>78</sup> Brenda E. Stevenson, *op. cit.*, 165-169.

The District Attorney would have this court ignore the very real terror that was experienced by the Du family before the shooting and the fear whether it was reasonable or unreasonable but the fear experienced by Mrs. Du on the day of the shooting. But these are things that I cannot ignore. And I cannot ignore the reason that Mrs. Du was in the store that day.

The Du's son had begged his parents to close that store because he was afraid. He had been the victim over and over of robberies and terrorism in that same store. And on the day of the shooting, Mrs. Du went to work with her husband so that her son would not have to face another day of fear.<sup>79</sup>

Moreover, the *Hankook Ilbo* alluded to her morality by emphasizing that she was a devout Christian and that she had been doing goodwill activities such as sending money to lepers and poor children in South Korea. Du was portrayed as a "God-fearing" woman whose older brothers were reverends in South Korea. The Korean ethnic media also reported that Du was respected as "one of the most religious women" by a fellow deacon of a Korean ethnic church in the San Fernando Valley.<sup>80</sup> Likewise, the *Los Angeles Times* also depicted Du as a moral and religious woman who was often agonizing over the moral issues involved in doing a liquor business: "Who should have to do business with a loaded gun? How can a deaconess of the Valley Korean Central Presbyterian Church earn a living selling liquor? How long must we stay?"<sup>81</sup>

On the other hand, however, the Korean ethnic media and Du's defense attorney reracialized the Harlins-Du incident by demoralizing Harlins as a delinquent teenager. Individual

---

<sup>79</sup> Court Reporter's Daily Transcript of the Proceedings, Superior Court of the State of California for the County of Los Angeles, Department No. 134, Hon. Joyce A. Karlin, Judge, *The People of the State of California, Plaintiff, vs. Soon Ja Du, Defendant*, Case No. BA 037738 (Probation and Sentence), November 15, 1991, 43, Los Angeles County Records Center.

<sup>80</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, March 27, March 28, 1991; *Korea Times*, April 3, 1991.

<sup>81</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 1991.

Korean immigrants also suggested she was a runaway and therefore lacking in moral character. One Korean merchant who served Black customers for about twenty years questioned “the runaway Black girl’s morality” and regarded such a lack morality as a fundamental problem of the Black community by insisting that Black people didn’t understand well enough why they had been mistreated.<sup>82</sup>

Furthermore, the *Hankook Ilbo* and Charles Lloyd reracialized the shooting incident by defeminizing the fifteen-year-old girl as an adult with a massive physique and a powerful punch.<sup>83</sup> Quoting Harlins’s autopsy report, the Korean-language paper chose to include the detail that her body was fully developed as an adult body, in spite of the fact that she was a fifteen-year-old girl. Such an image was paired with images of Du, whose right eye was badly bruised and swollen from the scuffle over the orange juice, indicating that Du was a victim attacked by an adult. On May 2, at the Los Angeles County Superior Court, Charles Lloyd also emphasized that Harlins was brawny enough to beat Du. During an interview with the *Hankook Ilbo* on May 15, the eloquent attorney stressed that Harlins, weighing one hundred fifty-two pounds, was large and powerful enough for Du to feel a threat to her life.<sup>84</sup> An effort to masculinize Latasha Harlins continued during the trial of Soon Ja Du. In answering a question raised by another defense attorney Richard Leonard, Du stated that Harlins “appeared like a male” at first sight. Du also contributed to such a masculinization of the teenage girl by stating that “the fist felt like an iron.”<sup>85</sup> In addition, Harlins was defeminized as an experienced street fighter by

---

<sup>82</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, March 24.

<sup>83</sup> See also Brenda E. Stevenson, op. cit., 165-169; Neil Gotanda, op. cit., 88, 93-94.

<sup>84</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, April 18, May 3, and May 17, 1991. For the image of the swollen black eye, see *Hankook Ilbo*, March 21, 1991. Meanwhile, Soon Ja Du’s weight was estimated by Augustina Jhi-ho Chae to be hovering between 150 and 155 pounds. See Augustina Jhi-ho Chae, op. cit., 161.

<sup>85</sup> *People v. Soon Ja Du*, Vol. 3, October 2, 1991, 325, 328.

Charles Lloyd who succeeded in drawing attention to scars on her knuckles during the trial.

Q: [Charles Lloyd] Your testimony is you only see one scar on one finger?

A: [Medical examiner Dr. Solomon L. Riley] Well, a scar for me is not evidence of recent injury.

Q: I didn't ask you about recent injury. We're just talking about scars.

...

Q: Tell me this now. How many scars do you see on the knuckles of the right hand?

A: I see two of which I can be sure, and there's a possibility that there's a third one, perhaps, one overlying the – the knuckle at the junction of the base of the – the third finger and the back of the hand.

Q: All right. Thank you, sir.<sup>86</sup>

In this way, as Brenda E. Stevenson analyzed, Harlins' gender was reversed "from that of a 'girl' to that of a 'guy,' from a female (the traditional, vulnerable victim) to a male (the traditional, violent assailant)."<sup>87</sup> Or, as Neil Gotanda maintained, Harlins was defeminized as an abusive male batterer while Du was overfeminized as an innocent battered woman.<sup>88</sup> Race, according to Robert G. Lee, is a mode of inscribing such social or cultural meanings onto the body.<sup>89</sup> In the Harlins-Du case, those meanings were structured in such a way as to provide a coherent narrative in which a domesticated, moral, and middle class woman had been severely

---

<sup>86</sup> *People v. Soon Ja Du*, Vol. 2, October 1, 1991, 147.

<sup>87</sup> Brenda E. Stevenson, *op. cit.*, 168.

<sup>88</sup> Neil Gotanda, *op. cit.*, 94.

<sup>89</sup> Robert G. Lee, "Fu Manchu Lives! Asian Pacific Americans as Permanent Aliens in American Culture," in Paul M. Ong, ed., *The State of Asian Pacific America: Transforming Race Relations* (Los Angeles: LEAP Asian Pacific American Public Policy Institute and UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 2000), 162.

battered by a male-like, delinquent, and criminal girl prior as a lead up to the shooting. As critical legal scholars Kimberlé Crenshaw and Garry Peller have mentioned, law and the courtroom are arenas in which conflicting narratives are contested. They are a place for “poetic justice” in which, according to Martha Craven Nussbaum, storytelling and literary imagination functioned as an essential component of a rational legal argument.<sup>90</sup> In this context, the sentence rendered by Superior Court Judge Joyce A. Karlin upon on an innocent and moral woman comes as no surprise.

### The John’s Liquor Store boycott

The tension between Black and Korean communities worsened following the Harlins-Du incident, and reached a boiling point when another killing took place, this time of a Black male in John’s Liquor Store, a Korean-owned store near 80th Street and Western Avenue in South Central Los Angeles. On June 4, 1991, Tae Sam Park, a Korean liquor store owner who immigrated to this country in 1978 through the family reunification route, shot to death Lee Arthur Mitchell. Although the Harlins-Du incident was captured on a silent surveillance camera, the shooting of Mitchell did not leave evidence other than Mitchell’s body, his belongings, and accounts given to police officers by Tae Sam Park, his wife Kum Ock Park, and a Korean employee of the store.

According to a police explanation which was reported in the *Los Angeles Times*, Mitchell entered the liquor outlet to buy a wine cooler. He had enough money to pay for the

---

<sup>90</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw and Garry Peller, “Reel Time/Real Justice,” in Robert Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 59; Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), xiii.

beverage, but tried to make the purchase by offering less than the sale price for the item. After being turned away by Kum Ock Park, Mitchell then pulled out a piece of jewelry from his pocket and asked whether he could make up a twenty five cent difference with the jewelry. After being refused again, Mitchell reportedly put his hand into another pocket and pretended to have a gun. When Mitchell tried to go behind the counter to take money out of the cash register, he was deterred by Tae Sam Park. Mitchell, a boxing trainer, attacked Park and broke his three ribs. During the fight, the store owner was eventually able to find a handgun under the counter and fired five shots into Mitchell.<sup>91</sup>

The *Hankook Ilbo* coverage of the shooting death was similar to the story produced by the *Los Angeles Times*. However, it sketched the shooting in a more vivid way by interviewing Tae Sam Park and other Korean merchants near John's Liquor Store. Park was portrayed by the Korean ethnic media as a courageous husband who without hesitation risked his own life to protect his wife from Mitchell's attack. While Mitchell was represented by the *Los Angeles Sentinel* as an "upstanding" "very level-headed" "financially stable," and non-violent "gentleman," the *Hankook Ilbo* dehumanized him as a monster that was undaunted by Park's gunfire. Before being shot by Park, according to the Korean ethnic media, Mitchell kicked Park's wife. Even after Park fired the first shot at Mitchell, Mitchell continued to lunge toward Park. While taking several steps backward, Park tried to fire a second shot but his gun misfired. Mitchell then threw himself hard against Park who fired several shots more while thinking "I'm going to die." After a while, the body of the attacker who was sitting on Park finally gave out and collapsed. Only then did Park realize that Mitchell was shot.<sup>92</sup>

---

<sup>91</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, June 18, 1991.

<sup>92</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 13 and 20, 1991; *Hankook Ilbo*, June 6 and 8, 1991.

In a short period of time after the death of Mitchell, the Los Angeles Police Department and the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office announced that the shooting was done in self-defense. On June 11, the LAPD South Bureau which covered most areas of South Central Los Angeles convened meetings with Black community leaders to give them information about the shooting. According to a briefing report prepared by Ron Wakabayashi, executive director of the Los Angeles City Human Relations Commission, Black community leaders apparently understood that the shooting happened "in the process of a commission of crime."<sup>93</sup> Jan Jung-Min Sunoo, president of the city commission, also said that "Mitchell was killed in the course of assaulting and attempting to rob a merchant, his wife and employee."<sup>94</sup> However, a coalition of Black religious and civic organizations refused to accept the conclusion of the official investigations. Instead, these organizations, led by Danny Bakewell of the Brotherhood Crusade and the Rev. Edgar E. Boyd of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, which was directly across the street from John's Liquor Store, initiated a ninety-day boycott on June 17, demanding that the case be reopened.

John's Liquor Store was reportedly a troublemaker for the Bethel AME Church across the street. According to Regina Freer, the church had been experiencing disagreements with the store because it sold liquor on Sunday and engaged in selling pornographic materials and drug paraphernalia.<sup>95</sup> To make matters worse, the self-defense conclusion heavily depended on accounts given by the Parks and the Korean employee. There were no other witnesses in the store.

---

<sup>93</sup> Ron Wakabayashi, "Black/Korean Conflict Briefing," June 24, 1991, file HR/00 P037e-002, box D-1295, The Los Angeles City Records Center and Archives.

<sup>94</sup> *Korea Times*, June 23, 1991.

<sup>95</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 20, 1991; Regina Freer, "Black-Korean Conflict," in Mark Baldassare, ed., *The Los Angeles Riots: Lessons for the Urban Future* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 189.

There was no video evidence of the shooting. It was for these reasons that the boycott leaders did not accept the police contention that the shooting was a justifiable homicide.<sup>96</sup>

More importantly, however, the boycott was driven by the languages of community control that Black ownership of local businesses was a precondition of the development of the Black community. This aspect was made clear in an article written by Tim Rutten in the *Los Angeles Times*. Rutten had interviewed the Rev. Edgar E. Boyd, according to whom the boycott was “a response first of all to absentee shop-keeping.” He denied a racial aspect of the boycott, saying that another Korean merchant near his church was “‘loved’ and ‘respected’” by local residents. However, he also confessed that a long term goal of the boycott was “to have businesses owned and operated by indigenous residents.”<sup>97</sup>

There were of course a few moderate voices concerned over the possibility that the boycott could lead to an abrogation of the civil rights of Korean merchants. In particular, Larry Aubry cautioned against becoming a “Korean basher” in his *Los Angeles Sentinel* column: “It would be tragic if African-Americans, a people with such a long and continuing history of oppression, were to become ‘Korean basher,’ with little or no regard for these people’s civil or human rights.”<sup>98</sup> Aubry’s warning voice, however, seemed to be silenced by the sound of people’s voices on the street. On the same page as Aubry’s column, the newspaper’s regular section titled “The People’s Pulse” asked “Can Anything Be Done to Improve Relations between Blacks and Koreans?” Four Blacks answered the question. Beverly Freeman, a female word processor, reproached Black people for lacking “love and respect” for themselves. But three

---

<sup>96</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, August 15 and 29, 1991.

<sup>97</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, June 21, 1991.

<sup>98</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 20, 1991.



other Black males bluntly expressed their anti-Korean sentiment. Allan Christian, a painter, denounced Koreans as “cannibals” who preyed on “civilized people” in his country. Steven Gayles, a technician, gave a negative answer to the question by saying that “Actually, no. They still will disrespect us. They don’t understand our culture and, for the most part, our language.” He added that Black people should have their own businesses and handle their “community as much as possible.” Another respondent advised against doing business with Koreans, insisting that Koreans should get out of the Black community because they didn’t respect Black people.

#### Korean American political “muscle”

According to mayoral advisor Yoon Hee Kim, the initial response of the Korean community leaders to the shooting death of Mitchell was “to take no action.” They thought that if they took action, it would complicate the matter. They were afraid that the shooting could lead to an undesirable consequence similar to the year-long boycott of Korean grocery stores in New York City. The existence of the Black-Korean Alliance also gave a feeling of relief that they could prevent situations from getting “out of hand.” As the boycott of John’s Liquor Store started, however, the Korean community leaders had no choice but to take action. They believed that the boycott was a result of exploitation of people’s emotions by some Black organizers. They were also convinced that if the boycott of John’s Liquor Store was considered as a success of the Black community, the boycott leaders would eventually try to boycott other Korean-owned stores for their own purposes. After several meetings since June 27, the Korean community leaders, especially young Korean Americans, thus gathered together under a new umbrella organization called “Koreatown Task Force on Community Relations.”<sup>99</sup> According to Marcia Choo, a

---

<sup>99</sup> Yoon Hee Kim, “Chung’s Liquor Market/Black-Korean Update (For Inter-Office Info Only),” July 8, 1991, folder

coordinator of the task force, it aimed to present a uniform voice for the Korean community and to “help shepherd the community response” to tragic events that had occurred between Black and Korean communities.<sup>100</sup>

The Korean community leaders made a special effort to bring pressure on the mayor through a letter writing campaign which demanded his public denunciation of the boycott. Even before the establishment of the Korean task force, David Kim, president of the Korean American Grocers Association of Southern California, sent Mayor Bradley a letter which asked for his public condemnation of “the people picketing in front of” John’s Liquor Store. In the same letter, dated June 24, 1991, Kim expressed concern over the possibility that the boycott could reproduce the Black-Korean problems in New York City on Los Angeles soil.<sup>101</sup> The Koreatown task force also emphasized in a letter sent to Mayor Bradley on July 2 that the Korean community would “no longer remain silently idle” when it was “being publicly and unjustly scapegoated for the social and economic injustices of the African American community,” urging the mayor to convene a press conference to publicly oppose the boycott, in spite of the fact that peaceful picketing was constitutionally protected.<sup>102</sup> The task force also succeeded in mobilizing other

---

5, box 0312, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers. John’s Liquor Store was often misnamed Chung’s Liquor Market by a number of reporters. “Chung” came from a previous owner’s name. See *Los Angeles Times*, July 2, 1991.

<sup>100</sup> *Korea Times*, July 21, 1991.

<sup>101</sup> A letter sent to Mayor Bradley by David Kim of KAGRO, June 24, 1991, folder 5, box 0312, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers.

<sup>102</sup> A letter sent to Mayor Bradley by Koreatown Task Force on Community Relations, July 2, 1991, folder 5, box 0312, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers. Peaceful picketing was entitled to constitutional protection in *Thornhill v. Alabama* (1940). Byron Thornhill, a union member, had been arrested for violating an Alabama law that forbade picketing but the Supreme Court of the United States made it clear that peaceful picketing was protected by the First Amendment. It was expected that the *Thornhill* decision would also apply to non-labor picketing. See “Notes: Non-Labor Picketing and the Thornhill Case,” *Columbia Law Review*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (1941), 89-93. However, prior to *NAACP v. Claiborne Hardware Co.* (1982), the Supreme Court of the United States had often decided that “legislatures could make peaceful consumer boycotts illegal” for economic reasons. As Michael C. Harper has noted, the Supreme Court asserted a new consumers’ right to boycott in the *Claiborne Hardware* case even if boycott actions have a negative effect on the economy. See Michael C. Harper, “The Consumer’s Emerging Right to Boycott:

Asian American organizations such as the Asian Pacific Planning Council, the Indochinese Youth Center, the Asian American Drug Abuse Program, and the Chinatown Service Center to participate in the letter-writing campaign.<sup>103</sup>

The K.A.R.E. (Korean American Race Relations Emergency Fund), an organization formed on July 2, 1991 by the task force to assist Tae Sam Park through a fundraising campaign as well as to address community and race relations, made also an effort to put pressure on Mayor Bradley to intervene in the boycott. In particular, Edward T. Chang, chairman of the K.A.R.E., asserted that the boycott of John's Liquor Store was an "unreasonable and excessive protest" by some Black organizations. During a meeting of the K.A.R.E., he announced that Mayor Bradley would make a public statement against the boycott, emphasizing that the statement would be the outcome of exerting "Korean 'muscle.'"<sup>104</sup> Against such a boycott, some K.A.R.E. members such as Korean Youth Center director Bong Hwan Kim and Korean American criminal defense attorney Angela Oh concentrated their energy on urging City Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas to play an important role in resolving the boycott.<sup>105</sup> Likewise, the *Hankook Ilbo* also demanded

---

*NAACP v. Claiborne Hardware* and Its Implications for American Labor Law," *The Yale Law Journal*, Vol. 93, No. 3 (1984), 409. In *Claiborne Hardware*, Blacks boycotted White merchants in Claiborne County, Mississippi in 1966 to pressure civic and business leaders to support their demands for equality and racial justice. In 1980, the Mississippi Supreme Court had concluded that the entire boycott was "unlawful" since some of the boycotters engaged in acts of force, violence, or threat against other customers. Two years later, the Supreme Court of the United States also opined that those boycotters who used violence should be held responsible for their deeds. At the same time, however, it reversed the Mississippi Supreme Court by stressing the following point: "The burden of demonstrating that it [the taint of violence] colored the entire collective effort, however, is not satisfied by evidence that violence occurred or even that violence contributed to the success of the boycott." See *NAACP v. Claiborne Hardware Co.*, 458 U.S. 886, 933; 102 S. Ct. 3409, 3436; 73 L. Ed. 2d 1215, 1249; 1982 U.S. LEXIS 49.

<sup>103</sup> Letters were sent to Mayor Bradley by the Indochinese Youth Center on July 8, 1991; by the Asian American Drug Abuse Program on July 8, 1991; and by the Chinatown Service Center on July 5, 1991, folder 19, box 4258, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers.

<sup>104</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, July 5, 1991; "Minutes of Koreatown K.A.R.E. Fund Task Force Meeting," July 22, 1991, folder 19, box 4247, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers.

<sup>105</sup> "Minutes of Koreatown K.A.R.E. Fund Task Force Meeting," August 12, 1991, folder 21, box 4247, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers.

that Mayor Bradley and prestigious Black groups such as the NAACP take actions to settle the boycott, delegitimizing the organizations in conflict with the Korean community as isolated extremist groups which did not represent the entire Black community.<sup>106</sup>

The Korean community leaders seemed to believe that the boycott would be easily resolved if Mayor Bradley, Mark Ridley-Thomas, and moderate Black civil rights organizations took public stances against it. But, to their great disappointment, these elected officials and civil rights groups were not in a position to exert their political influence in order to suspend the boycott. According to Gerald Horne, the Los Angeles NAACP had been under the control of a light-skinned Black middle class and isolated from the majority of darker-skinned Blacks since the 1960s. Its failure to keep in touch with poor and working-class Blacks created an opportunity for Black militant leaders to become influential in the Black community.<sup>107</sup> Therefore, even if the prestigious civil rights organization had publicly denounced the boycott, it would have been ineffective in persuading the boycott leaders to abandon their collective action.

Similarly, Mark Ridley-Thomas, elected to the Los Angeles City Council on the very same day that Lee Arthur Mitchell was shot to death, was not the person to raise a strong voice against the boycott. According to Patrick D. Joyce, the City Councilman was not significantly different from other Black public officials who were reluctant to spend their political capital in standing against Danny Bakewell, a Black community hero with unmatched credibility on the street.<sup>108</sup> During a meeting with the Korean community leaders on August 20 at the Korean

---

<sup>106</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, August 9, 1991.

<sup>107</sup> Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), 14, 123.

<sup>108</sup> Patrick D. Joyce, *No Fire Next Time: Black-Korean Conflicts and the Future of America's Cities* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 136-137.

Youth Center, Ridley-Thomas tried to relieve their anxiety by stating that he was making an effort to mediate the two communities behind the scenes.<sup>109</sup> Less than a month later, however, he appeared beside Bakewell and a few Black pastors when they announced a three-month selective buying campaign which was designed to expand the boycott of John's Liquor Store to include other businesses.<sup>110</sup>

Mayor Bradley was the public figure from whom the Korean community leaders had likely expected the most support. More than any other former mayor, he was considered to maintain friendly relations with the Korean community. Furthermore, it was surmised by the *Hankook Ilbo* that he could exert his political influence on the Black organizations to resolve the boycott.<sup>111</sup> Unfortunately, however, Mayor Bradley was not powerful enough to be able to control the boycott leaders. As Bong Hwan Kim said in an interview with Patrick D. Joyce, Bradley, unlike Bakewell, didn't have "a pretty solid following in the black community."<sup>112</sup> Moreover, Bradley owed too much to Bakewell to publicly denounce the boycott of John's Liquor Store. For example, when even liberal City Council members did not want to confront LAPD Chief Daryl F. Gates but rather voiced their demand for Bradley's resignation after the beating of Rodney King, Bakewell defended Mayor Bradley, who was a long-time critic of the Police Chief.<sup>113</sup>

Indeed, it would be too severe to say that Mayor Bradley did not do anything to help

---

<sup>109</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, August 23, 1991.

<sup>110</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, September 12 and 19, 1991.

<sup>111</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, August 9, 1991.

<sup>112</sup> Quote from Patrick D. Joyce, op. cit., 141.

<sup>113</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, April 5, 1991.

resolve the boycott. However, the mayor's intervention in the boycott fell far short of the expectations of the Korean community leaders. During the meeting of K.A.R.E on August 12, Yoon Hee Kim said that if the mayor made a statement about the John's Liquor Store boycott, the Korean community should applaud his courage to risk opposition among the Black community to such action.<sup>114</sup> On the next day, Mayor Bradley appeared in front of Champion Liquor Deli at 66th and Figueroa Street in South Central Los Angeles. The liquor outlet was owned by a Korean merchant, Tae Suk Kim, and seriously destroyed by an arson fire which was reportedly the result of a dispute between the Korean merchant and a Black customer. Mayor Bradley used the incident to articulate his comments on tensions between the Black and Korean communities. From the perspective of the Korean community, however, Bradley's public statement at the press conference was not satisfactory at all because it denounced not the John's Liquor Store boycott but the arson only. Although he emphasized he would not tolerate any violence against legitimate businesses, he even indicated that the John's Liquor Store boycott was a peaceful case which should not be condemned.<sup>115</sup>

It was only after John's Liquor Store and Soon Ja Du's Empire Liquor Market Deli were firebombed in the early morning of Saturday, August 17 and other public officials condemned the John's Liquor Store boycott as being responsible for the arson fires that the mayor began to speak out. On the Monday following the firebomb attacks, Minnie Lopez-Baffo, president of the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission, portrayed the boycott as "a needless and dangerous aggravation" in a letter sent to Los Angeles County Supervisor Mike Antonovich and urged him to "call clearly and publicly for an end to the killing, confrontation, *and current*

---

<sup>114</sup> "Minutes of Koreatown K.A.R.E. Fund Task Force Meeting," August 12, 1991, folder 21, box 4247, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers.

<sup>115</sup> Office of Mayor, "News," August 13, 1991, folder 4, box 4253, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers.

*boycotts.*”<sup>116</sup> Two days later, the County Supervisor responded to the letter by holding a press conference to announce that the current violence and threat against the Korean merchants should be immediately suspended.<sup>117</sup>

Such interventions by public officials must have reduced the political risk the mayor would face in dealing with the boycott. At last, on August 30, the mayor arranged a closed meeting between the boycott organizers and the police officers who had investigated the shooting death of Mitchell. At the meeting, Commander Ron Banks of the LAPD South Bureau explained to the Rev. Boyd and Joe Gardner of the Bethel AME Church why the District Attorney refused to file criminal charges against Tae Sam Park. According to the Commander, Mayor Bradley was “very firm and made it very clear” that he opposed the John’s Liquor Store boycott. After the meeting, the mayor also said that “a major step forward” was accomplished. Such optimism was not shared by all participants. In particular, the Rev. Boyd uncompromisingly stated that “nothing has changed.” He also vowed that the boycott would continue until John’s Liquor Store was shut down or Tae Sam Pak was brought to trial.<sup>118</sup> Of course, the pastor’s hard-line stance might have been a tactic aimed at improving the negotiating leverage of the organizers. But it also clearly demonstrated that the boycott leaders were not easily swayed by the mayor, even though the Korean community expected him to exert substantial influence over the Black community.

---

<sup>116</sup> A letter sent to Los Angeles County Supervisor Mike Antonovich by Minnie Lopez-Baffo of the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission, August 19, 1991, folder 5, box 0312, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers. According to Ron Wakabayashi of the city human relations commission, the letter had also been sent to Mayor Bradley and the City Council. See Ron Wakabayashi, “Los Angeles County Human Relations Call to End South Central Boycotts,” August 23, 1991, folder 5, box 0312, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers.

<sup>117</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, August 24, 1991.

<sup>118</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, August 31, 1991.

### K.A.R.E. and generational difference

As the Rev. Boyd vowed, the John's Liquor Store boycott continued over the following month. The boycott, which had begun on June 17, was entering its twelfth week in early September. The Korean community had to reexamine its response. In this process, as Angie Y. Chung has mentioned, Los Angeles Korean Americans experienced a generational clash over financial support to Tae Sam Park.<sup>119</sup> It was the K.A.R.E. that was at the center of the clash between the immigrant first generation leaders and the 1.5/second generation leaders. About two weeks after the beginning of the John's Liquor Store boycott, six young Korean Americans established the H.E.L.F. (Human Relation Emergency League Fund) to take a more active stance to address the Black-Korean tension.<sup>120</sup> While the young Korean Americans provided it with leadership, first generation immigrant organizations such as the Korean American Grocers Association offered financial support. The "first priority" of the cross-generational group was to support John's Liquor Store. Its members also agreed that they would develop a long-term strategy to help the Korean community in terms of interethnic relations.<sup>121</sup>

The John's Liquor Store boycott was transformed into a community-wide issue partly by the K.A.R.E. fundraising campaign. As Tae Sam Park said at a meeting of Korean community leaders, John's Liquor Store "belonged not to him any more but to the Korean community" after

---

<sup>119</sup> Angie Y. Chung, *Legacies of Struggle: Conflict and Cooperation in Korean American Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 90.

<sup>120</sup> Edward T. Chang, then professor at Cal Poly Pomona University, served as chairman of the organization. The other five founding members were Marcia Choo of the Asian Pacific American Dispute Resolution Center; Laura Jeon of the Korean Health Education, Information and Referral Center; Hak Jae Chung; Jerry Yu of the Korean American Coalition; Bong Hwan Kim of the Korean Youth Center.

<sup>121</sup> "Minutes of Koreatown K.A.R.E. Fund Task Force Meeting," July 22, 1991, folder 19, box 4247, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers.



the campaign.<sup>122</sup> The K.A.R.E. used the funds raised to provide income for Park and to employ a part-time Latino security guard. It installed collection boxes in Korean ethnic banks to encourage wider participation in the fundraising campaign. The *Hankook Ilbo* also played a significant role in mobilizing Korean immigrants to support the liquor store owner. While suggesting that the boycott caused pain not just to the individual but also to the entire community, it encouraged readers to empathize with Park's sorrow and pain by publishing his diaries, titled "Nanŭn Oeropji Anta [I'm Not Lonely]," on his experiences of becoming the target of a boycott. The fundraising effort of K.A.R.E. was also expanded into a nation-wide campaign when many Koreans in New York, Seattle, and Atlanta sent encouraging letters and donations in support of Tae Sam Park.<sup>123</sup>

Although K.A.R.E. announced that it would collect \$100,000 within the first three months, there was a lack of consensus on an issue of how long it would financially support the Korean merchant. During a K.A.R.E. meeting held about one month after its establishment, some Korean Americans expressed concerns over the possibility that their financial support could protract the boycott. For example, Jai-Lee Wong of the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission informed those present at the meeting that some people in the Black community suggested that the raised funds "could be channeled to projects directly making an impact on the community." On the other hand, Jerry Yu of the Korean American Coalition suggested that they should continue to raise funds for the store if the boycott persisted.<sup>124</sup> K.A.R.E. held another meeting the following week to make an action plan based on a ninety-day commitment. However,

---

<sup>122</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, July 4, 1991.

<sup>123</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, July 5, July 6, July 24, July 27, August 6, and August 13, 1991.

<sup>124</sup> "Minutes of Koreatown K.A.R.E. Fund Task Force Meeting," August 5, 1991, folder 21, box 4247, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers.

the debate on how to spend the funds persisted, cracking along generational lines within the organization. One member proposed the idea of a “rotary loan at low interest” to finance an establishment of a dispute prevention center. The chairman of K.A.R.E. also welcomed the idea, but expressed concern over how to elicit Korean community support for the project. As if to confirm the chairman’s concern, the idea was strongly opposed by Yang Il Kim, president of the National Korean American Grocers Association, who emphasized that the funds should be spent for Tae Sam Park and that first generation Korean immigrants “would not be in favor of the loan.”<sup>125</sup>

As the boycott seemed increasingly unlikely to be resolved despite the mayor’s efforts in late August, K.A.R.E. finally informed Tae Sam Park on September 10 that it would support him only until the end of September. K.A.R.E. also officially announced on September 25 that it would stop the financial aid and use the remaining funds for developing programs to reduce the Black-Korean tension. In spite of the fact that it was K.A.R.E. that appealed to the Korean community specifically for participation in its fundraising campaign, it now made the announcement that the boycott should have been addressed not as a community issue between Blacks and Koreans but as a dispute between a customer and a merchant, while arguing that the boycott was Park’s personal problem associated with doing business. Despite the fact that it was K.A.R.E. that gave the “first priority” to the John’s Liquor Store boycott, it now strongly claimed that it was “never intended to be a ‘Save Park Tae Sam’ fund.”<sup>126</sup> Accordingly, Park angrily responded to the K.A.R.E. declarations by complaining that K.A.R.E. was essentially saying “it’s

---

<sup>125</sup> “Minutes of Koreatown K.A.R.E. Fund Task Force Meeting,” August 12, 1991, folder 21, box 4247, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers.

<sup>126</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, September 12 and September 26, 1991; *Korea Times*, October 7, 1991.

your problem, why don't you take care of yourself."<sup>127</sup> In some way, it was not entirely unreasonable that Park, for his part, felt betrayed by the young Korean Americans because K.A.R.E. significantly contributed to the expansion of the boycott into a community issue, although it was also true that it helped him endure the boycott. Such decisions by the younger generation Korean American leaders were also strongly criticized by first generation Korean immigrants who felt that the remaining funds should be given not to K.A.R.E. but to Park. The young Korean Americans were even called "swindlers" by older immigrant leaders.<sup>128</sup>

In an interview with the *Hankook Ilbo* in early July, Edward T. Chang, chairman of K.A.R.E., expressed that he expected that the organization would play a pivotal role in overcoming generational differences in the Korean community by helping first generation Korean immigrants who were caught in a predicament. But the pivot was too weak to bear the heavy load imposed by the boycott. It proved to be too weak to connect first and 1.5/second generation Koreans together. It might be partly because the first generation leaders, as the chairman complained in another interview with the same paper, were not willing to compromise and cooperate with the younger generation leaders. But it was also partly because the younger leaders were inexperienced or overly optimistic. As Chang confessed, they thought that if they would raise funds and help the merchants endure the boycott, it would be resolved.<sup>129</sup> Contrary to their unsound forecast, their fundraising campaign resulted in a stimulation of the boycott organizers to look "at all possible 'bargaining chips' to sustain their campaign."<sup>130</sup> K.A.R.E.

---

<sup>127</sup> *Korea Times*, October 7, 1991.

<sup>128</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, October 10, 1991.

<sup>129</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, September 13, 1991.

<sup>130</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, September 11, 1991.

itself lasted less than one hundred days before it ultimately closed down in early October. Its decision to stop financially supporting Park facilitated negotiations with the boycott leaders, while the generational gap widened.<sup>131</sup> Its dissolution consolidated those voices within the Korean immigrant community took a hard-line, confrontational approach to the Black-Korean tension from the late fall of 1991 through the winter and spring of 1992.

---

<sup>131</sup> In-Jin Yoon, *On My Own: Korean Businesses and Race Relations in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 194; Angie Y. Chung, *op. cit.*, 91.

## **Chapter Four**

### **From Conflict to Crisis**

Although Black-Korean conflicts led the Los Angeles Korean community to make an effort to improve mutual understanding and cooperation between the two groups, the tensions also gave rise to uncompromising and confrontational languages. The tone became especially acute among first generation Korean immigrants when they experienced the Black activist-led boycott of a Korean-owned store for more than one hundred days from mid-June to early October 1991. The “hard-line” sentiment behind the boycott was greatly fortified by the release of “Black Korea” by Los Angeles-based rapper Ice Cube. The lyrics of “Black Korea” explicitly threatened Korean merchants. The winter of 1991-1992 also saw a sharp increase in hate crimes committed by Blacks against persons appearing to be Korean and their property. The most significant blow to relations between the two communities came on April 29, 1992, the day that four Los Angeles Police Department officers were acquitted by a jury in Simi Valley, California, of charges stemming from the videotaped brutal beating of Black motorist Rodney King. The verdicts took the lid off of decades of simmering anger and frustration in the Black community at how the LAPD had treated them. This long pent-up fury set the streets of Los Angeles ablaze for several days, inflicting tremendous damage on the Korean community as well as many others.

The first section of this chapter presents an overview of collective actions of Korean Americans against the controversial song “Black Korea.” The rest of the chapter is devoted to an in-depth discussion of how Korean Americans responded to the Los Angeles riots. Special attention is given to the discursive practices by which Korean Americans created a counternarrative in response to post-riot discourse that framed the events as a result of Black-Korean conflicts, accusing the Korean community of being responsible for, rather than the

victims of, the riots. In particular, I argue that a melodramatic imagination provided Korean Americans with a discursive structure for narrativizing the world as an arena in which good will eventually win over evil after enduring hardship. As “a certain fictional system for making sense of experience,” according to Peter Brooks, melodrama tells “the triumph of virtue at the end.” While the innocent and virtuous are initially fallen, eclipsed, and even expelled, they are ultimately acknowledged and restored as a sign of the eventual victory of virtue. This type of narrative has a strong appeal to the voiceless and powerless. It places their suffering within meaningful contexts and constitutes them as political subjects who confront oppression: for example, “a poor persecuted girl can confront her powerful oppressor with the truth about their moral conditions.”<sup>1</sup>

Languages of melodramatic imagination enabled Korean Americans to identify themselves as the powerless yet virtuous, experiencing extreme suffering. Not only did melodramatic languages place their suffering in a meaningful framework, they also discursively constituted their subject positions as innocent victims caught by mishap in the middle of a clash between Blacks and Whites. Furthermore, they constituted themselves as innocent scapegoats thrown to the rioters by a “White system” in order to avert the real threat of crisis between Blacks and Whites. In examining Korean Americans’ discursive practices, I seek to shed light on the processes by which Korean Americans appropriated the aesthetic form of the melodramatic imagination to counterframe the Los Angeles riots of 1992 into Black-White issues, and to constitute themselves as political subjects confronting the accusation that Korean Americans were responsible for the riots—the authors of their own misfortune.

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), xiii, 32, and 44. See also Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 179-180.

## Red flags

The Black boycott of John's Liquor Store owned by Korean merchant Tae Sam Park strengthened uncompromising and confrontational languages in the Los Angeles Korean community. Outbreaks of violence between the two communities reinforced many Koreans' hard-line position on Black-Korean tension, causing some Korean immigrants to demand reciprocally violent responses. One frustrated Korean immigrant even insisted that the Korean community should form a "Korean Crusade" to fight against the Brotherhood Crusade. The *Hankook Ilbo*, a major Korean newspaper published in Southern California, also contributed to the spread of confrontational languages by questioning the effectiveness of dialogue as a means to relieve the Black-Korean conflicts. Like some uncompromising Korean immigrants, some in the ethnic media urged the Korean community to discard its previous submissive and passive attitude toward the Black community. The upsurge of hard-line sentiment within the Korean community led to heavy criticism of the agreement that ultimately settled the John's Liquor Store boycott as yielding too much to the Black community.<sup>2</sup>

The voice of hard-liners in the Korean community was strengthened again by the shooting death of a Korean liquor store owner by a group of three Black robbers in the City of Montclair on the day when the John's Liquor Store agreement was publicly announced. Hard-liners also found community support when a nine-year-old Korean girl was shot on October 19, 1991 by a Black male during a hold-up of a gas station in South Central Los Angeles. The robber entered a backroom to find Hong-Ku Kang, his wife, and their daughter. After robbing them at

---

<sup>2</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, September 20, September 21, and October 5, 1991.

gunpoint of approximately \$3,000, he shot and critically wounded the little girl “for no reason.”<sup>3</sup> Three days after the shooting incident, Black community leaders expressed their apologies for the shooting. While describing the shooting as an act of “senseless violence,” Danny Bakewell sought to rule out the possibility that it was racially motivated.<sup>4</sup>

Bakewell’s response to the shooting of Korean girl was welcomed by Korean community leaders. For example, Gary Kim, president of the Korean American Coalition, said, “I think it’s good that the African American community is stepping forward and realizing that this really is a crime issue and not a Korean-black issue.”<sup>5</sup> A tragic incident, the shooting provided an opportunity for Korean community leaders who had sought to define the intergroup tension as a violent crime that occurred between customers and merchants rather than between Blacks and Koreans. At a symposium held by the Korean Chamber of Commerce of Los Angeles on October 26, 1991, Korean community leaders concluded that if such conflicts were described in racial terms, the Korean community would be in a disadvantageous position and that the Korean community should speak in a single voice to assert that the so-called Black-Korean conflicts were nothing but crimes.<sup>6</sup>

According to the *Hankook Ilbo*, however, many Korean immigrants considered the efforts of the Korean community leaders as weak in articulating their indignation. Many of them insisted that the Korean community leaders should have expressed more direct against Bakewell,

---

<sup>3</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, October 6 and October 21, 1991.

<sup>4</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October 30, 1991.

<sup>5</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, October 21, 1991; *Korea Times*, October 28, 1991.

<sup>6</sup> The Korean Chamber of Commerce of Los Angeles, “Hanhük Kwan’gye Symposium Pogosö [Report on the Symposium on the Black-Korean Relations],” October 26, 1991, folder 21, box 4245, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers.



and that treating the shooting as simply a criminal act understated the seriousness of Black-Korean conflicts.<sup>7</sup> Their frustration with the lukewarm responses of the community leaders was exacerbated by the killing of a Korean wig merchant by two Black robbers in a fashion accessories store at Western Avenue and Jefferson Boulevard. The merchant was reportedly the nineteenth Korean murder victim of Black robberies in Los Angeles since 1987. On October 29, one day after the murder, an arson attack against a Korean liquor store in the City of Whittier further inflamed the Korean community.<sup>8</sup>

The end-of-October release of rapper Ice Cube's, *Death Certificate*, became an opening for the hard-line Koreans to take stronger action against crimes by Blacks against Koreans. In particular, a short and highly controversial song entitled "Black Korea" caused the Korean community to take a strong stand against the Black rapper. Musically speaking, this album showed that Ice Cube had reached a higher level of rapping skill than his peers, demonstrating masterful skill by "putting in words in ways other rappers wouldn't attempt, like a trumpet lilt and then parping, squeaking but following and recreating the beat."<sup>9</sup> *Death Certificate* was also a thematically structured album. It was divided into two sides: the death side and the life side. According to an interview between Ice Cube and Angela Y. Davis, the first track ("The Funeral") of the death side indicated the mental death of Black people. The life side was conceived by him to awaken Black people's consciousness of themselves and their destiny.<sup>10</sup> Having pioneered a new hip-hop music genre, known as "gangsta rap" in the late 1980s, at that point Ice Cube was

---

<sup>7</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, October 25, 1991.

<sup>8</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, October 30 and 31, 1991.

<sup>9</sup> Brian Cross, *It's Not about a Salary...Rap, Race and Resistance in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1993), 63.

<sup>10</sup> Ice Cube and Angela Y. Davis, "Nappy Happy," *Transition*, No. 58 (1992), 180.

not a street hustler, but instead, a Black nationalist who was singing sociopolitical gospels written in violent and incendiary street languages. On the album sleeve, Ice Cube cut his Jheri curl, then a trademark of many Los Angeles gang members. While reading a copy of *The Final Call*, a bi-weekly publication of the Nation of Islam, he also stood between a dozen Black men who were standing or sitting formlessly in gang style clothing and nine Fruit of Islam members. The latter group were the Black nationalist organization's security guards, lined up in three rows and dressed in suits and bow ties. The image clearly represented Ice Cube's nationalist turn. Unlike many of Los Angeles gangsta rappers who were critical of Black nationalism, Ice Cube appropriated it in his call for a rebirth of Black people.<sup>11</sup>

Regina Freer has marked "xenophobic" sentiment among Blacks as an example of how people of color use the master's tools of oppression in order to be recognized as full citizens, a particularly important insight in light of Jeff Chang's observation that the reverse side of Ice Cube's record demonstrates a deep antipathy toward Asian immigrants.<sup>12</sup> The songs on this side articulated Black people's "deep-seated fear of erasure" by a massive influx of Asian merchants into South Central Los Angeles. In a song entitled "Us" on the life side of the album, Ice Cube got angry with "Japs grabbing every vacant lot in my 'hood to build a store and sell they [sic] goods." His anger exploded even more fiercely in the album's fifteenth track, "Black Korea".<sup>13</sup> The lyrics of "Black Korea" captured pent-up frustrations of Black people in South Central Los

---

<sup>11</sup> On the antipathy of West Coast rappers toward Black nationalism, see Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 212.

<sup>12</sup> Regina Freer, "Black-Korean Conflict," in Mark Baldassare, ed., *The Los Angeles Riots: Lessons for the Urban Future* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 191.

<sup>13</sup> Jeff Chang, "Race, Class, Conflict and Empowerment: On Ice Cube's 'Black Korea,'" in Edward T. Chang and Russell C. Leong, eds., *Los Angeles: Struggles toward Multiethnic Community* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 88; idem, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: Picador, 2005), 346.

Angeles, giving voice to their resentments over disrespectful and “penny-pinching” Korean merchants in their community. The song articulated Black anger toward Korean merchants who “criminalized” Black customers by suspiciously watching their movements in tiny stores. It voiced their indignation over Korean merchants who disregarded unemployed Black youth. “Black Korea” also gave voice to xenophobic sentiment in the Black community, and even worse, sanctioned the use of violence and force to coerce Korean merchants into respecting Black people. For example, the song threatened a racially motivated arson attack on stores owned by foreign merchants. The lyrics discursively portrayed an “oriental female merchant” with a “little chop suey ass.” Ice Cube sang of antipathy from Black people toward the increase of foreign merchants with poor English skills in South Central Los Angeles.

In response to “Black Korea,” the Korean community sought to flex some political muscle. On November 4, the Korean American Coalition held a press conference with other Korean American organizations to call on retailers to stop selling the album. By emphasizing that Ice Cube’s rap songs were not just a Korean issue but a racial hatred and violence issue affecting different ethnic groups, the effort succeeded in getting endorsements from multiple ethnic organizations including some Black organizations such as the Los Angeles Urban League and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.<sup>14</sup> Korean American leaders also urged members of their community to write protest letters to Priority Records, the company distributing the record. They also asked Mayor Bradley to take actions against the distribution of the album. On November 4, mayoral advisor Yoon Hee Kim recommended to the mayor that he ask the distribution company to “voluntarily recall all of the albums currently out at stores.” After having

---

<sup>14</sup> Korean American Alliance, “Press Release: Rap Album Denounced for Promoting Racial Violence,” November 4, 1991 and “Press Release: KAC Releases Statement on Ice Cube Album,” November 13, 1991, folder 9, box 4248, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers.

been silent for more than a month, the mayor acceded to the demands of the Korean community and sent Bryan Turner, president of Priority Records, a letter asking the distribution company to demonstrate “a greater sensitivity about the potential impact on the public” of its products.<sup>15</sup>

The Korean community found an ally in the Los Angeles Jewish community which also bitterly opposed Ice Cube’s album. The last track, entitled “No Vaseline,” encouraged the killing of Ice Cube’s Jewish former manager Jerry Heller, and caused Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of a Jewish human rights organization in Los Angeles, to call on four national record chains to stop selling the album.<sup>16</sup> *Death Certificate* was also condemned by the music industry trade magazine *Billboard* for expressing “the rankest sort of racism and hatemongering.” It urged retailers and record companies to protest the hateful sentiments voiced by Ice Cube.<sup>17</sup>

To protest Ice Cube’s “Black Korea,” a majority of Korean grocers in South Central Los Angeles also mobilized their purchasing power against McKenzie River Corporation, a San Francisco-based brewer, which contracted Ice Cube to promote its malt liquor named “St. Ides.” In early November, Korean grocers stopped selling and ordering the malt liquor, refusing deliveries from McKenzie River Corporation because of their use of Ice Cube for its commercials and advertisements. The St. Ides boycott expanded to include many Korean grocers in Long Beach, Pacoima, San Fernando Valley and San Bernardino County.<sup>18</sup> When McKenzie River President Minott Wessinger refused to accept the Korean merchants’ demand that it

---

<sup>15</sup> *Korea Times*, November 11, 1991; A letter sent to Mayor Bradley by Korean Restaurant Owners Association of Southern California, November 15, 1991; Yoon Hee Kim, “Rap Group Ice Cube’s New Album Entitled ‘Death Certificate’ (Latest Incident of Current B/K and Race Relations Issues),” November 4, 1991; A letter sent to Bryan Turner by Mayor Bradley, December 12, 1991, folder 9, box 4248, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers.

<sup>16</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, November 2, 1991.

<sup>17</sup> *Billboard*, November 23, 1991.

<sup>18</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, November 8, 1991.

discontinue all commercials and advertisements featuring Ice Cube, the National Korean American Grocers Association pushed local associations of Korean grocers to pressure the brewing company into accept the demands. The St. Ides boycott was joined at its height by approximately five to six thousand stores in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oakland, San Jose, Seattle, Tacoma, Portland, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Richmond, and Washington D.C. In a brief span of time, the boycott resulted in a loss of \$7 million to the brewing company.<sup>19</sup>

Apart from such confrontations, there were efforts to improve the relations between Blacks and Koreans. On November 14, 1991, the Korean American Grocers Association announced that it would launch a program to create one hundred jobs for youths in South Central Los Angeles.<sup>20</sup> In the following month, Mayor Bradley and the Los Angeles City Human Relations Commission constructed a partnership with several banks serving the needs of Korean small businesses to create an education course called, “Doing Business in South Central Los Angeles,” designed to train newcomer merchants to be “responsible business persons.”<sup>21</sup> The grocers association also pledged to promote a spirit of good faith between merchants and customers by establishing the ten-point “Good Business Practice” principles in January 1992.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, November 9 and 12, 1991; *Korea Times*, November 18, 1991; Jeff Chang, “Race, Class, Conflict and Empowerment: On Ice Cube’s ‘Black Korea,’” in Edward T. Chang and Russell C. Leong, eds., *Los Angeles: Struggles toward Multiethnic Community* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 97; Pyong Gap Min, *Caught in the Middle: Korean Communities in New York and Los Angeles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 147.

<sup>20</sup> Office of Mayor, “News: Bradley Announces Major Jobs Program to Be Sponsored by Korean American Grocers Association for South Central Residents,” November 14, 1991, folder 8, box 0187, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers.

<sup>21</sup> Los Angeles City Human Relations Commission, *Doing Business in South Central Los Angeles: A Training Design for Newcomer Merchants*, December, 1991, file HR/00 P037e-002, box D-1295, The Los Angeles City Records Center and Archives.

<sup>22</sup> Korean American Grocers Association, “The Korean American Grocers Association (KAGRO) Statement of ‘Good Business Practice’ Principles,” January 24, 1992, folder 8, box 0187, Tom Bradley Administrative Papers.

The case of Soon Ja Du undermined efforts to construct a bridge between Black and Korean communities. Judge Joyce A. Karlin's decision to grant probation to the Korean female merchant who had shot and killed a young Black teenager named Latasha Harlins was welcomed by most Korean community leaders as an expression of impartial courage. The *Hankook Ilbo* editorialized that the decision proved there were courageous people like Karlin in the United States.<sup>23</sup> It was difficult for Koreans to publicly express regret at the sentencing decision. Those who opposed the judge's decision faced a barrage of community criticism. For example, Bong Hwan Kim, director of the Korean Youth Center, linked arms with some Black activists to argue that a judge's leeway for sentencing needed to be reduced while community involvement in sentencing decisions should be increased. Some members of the Korean community responded publicly with abuse toward Kim and with disrespect toward the Black community. Inflammatory rhetoric included asking, "Who is this Kim Bong Hwan anyway, a Korean or a nigger?"<sup>24</sup>

Needless to say, the Black community was outraged by Judge Karlin's lenient sentencing of Soon Ja Du. Richard Harlins, uncle of the slain girl, let loose his burning anger and even threatened to pay back Du for the death of his niece, angrily declaring that, "That bitch is gonna get killed...She killed my niece. She's going to pay."<sup>25</sup> On a letter sent to the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, one reader expressed his frustration with Karlin's sentencing decision by employing the languages of Black nativism: "A foreigner killed a 'home-born' citizen and the foreigner was not punished."<sup>26</sup> It apparently made no difference that Du was a naturalized American citizen.

---

<sup>23</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, November 22, 1991.

<sup>24</sup> Elaine H. Kim, "Between Black and White: An Interview with Bong Hwan Kim," in Karin Aguilar-San Juan, ed., *The State of Asian America: Activism and Resistance in the 1990s* (Boston: South End Press, 1994), 86.

<sup>25</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, November 21, 1991.

<sup>26</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, December 12, 1991.

Danny Bakewell appeared to tap into the reservoir of anti-Korean sentiment among South Central residents when he stretched the middle syllable of the word Koreans (“Kor-EE-ans”), reminding veteran *Los Angeles Times* political reporter Bill Boyarsky of how past sheriffs in the U.S. South had sneered at Black people by elongating “Nee-gro.”<sup>27</sup> Standing with Compton Mayor Walter Tucker, Bakewell threatened to boycott Korean-owned stores in the city.<sup>28</sup>

Anti-Korean sentiments resulted in a sharp increase in violent, hate-related incidents against Korean immigrants in Los Angeles. According to an analysis by Nadine Koch and H. Eric Schockman, there were no recorded hate crimes between the Black and Korean communities from March 1990 to March 1991. However, hate crimes between the two communities erupted in the month following the shooting death of Latasha Harlins and rapidly increased in the winter of 1991-1992.<sup>29</sup> On December 4, for example, a Thai woman who stopped her car at a Compton intersection for a traffic signal was mistaken as a Korean and victimized by two alleged members of a Los Angeles-based Black gang. They pulled the woman out of the car, smashed the car window with a baseball bat, and then physically assaulted her with the weapon to avenge the death of Harlins.<sup>30</sup> Ten days later, Korean merchant Yong Tae Park was shot to death by two Black robbers in his liquor store on Pico and Fedora Avenue, a predominantly Latino area. Although police stressed that the shooting was not racially motivated,

---

<sup>27</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, November 20, 1991.

<sup>28</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, December 14, 1991.

<sup>29</sup> Nadine Koch and H. Eric Schockman, “Riot, Rebellion or Civil Unrest? The Korean American and African American Business Communities in Los Angeles,” in George O. Totten III and H. Eric Schockman, eds., *Community in Crisis: The Korean American Community after the Los Angeles Civil Unrest of April 1992* (Los Angeles: Center for Multiethnic and Transnational Studies, University of Southern California, 1994), 67-70, 74-76.

<sup>30</sup> Los Angeles City Human Relations Commission, “Recent Incidents of Anti-Asian Sentiment” (date unknown), file HR/00 O037e-0009, box D-1295, The Los Angeles City Records Center and Archives; *Korea Times*, December 30, 1991; *Hankook Ilbo*, December 20, 1991.

Park's murder forced many Korean merchants to feel like they were walking on pins and needles and to rely on rifles, surveillance cameras, and bullet-proof glass windows as measures that reflected their increasing concern over their safety.<sup>31</sup> In January 1992, a Chinese restaurant and a Korean liquor outlet suffered attacks by vandals who sprayed graffiti words "Latasha Harlins RIP" on the walls of both stores.<sup>32</sup> Such extreme hostility in the Los Angeles Black community was fueled again when confrontational Korean community leaders launched a letter-writing drive to support Judge Karlin who was facing a recall campaign pushed by the Black community. In April 1992, the Korean Senior Citizens Association even made financial contributions to the judge's campaign.<sup>33</sup>

All of these factors contributed to the escalation of conflicts between Blacks and Koreans, but none was probably as important as the sentencing of Soon Ja Du. As longtime journalist Lou Cannon mentioned, "The granting of probation to Soon Ja Du ignited a fire in South Central that was fueled by decades of neglect, indifference, and injustice. The fire smoldered through the warm Los Angeles winter and the spring to come, although few white people even noticed the smoke. It would take the spark of the next trial to set Los Angeles ablaze."<sup>34</sup>

### Eruption of the riots

---

<sup>31</sup> *Korea Times*, December 23 and 30, 1991; *Hankook Ilbo*, December 17, 1991.

<sup>32</sup> *Korea Times*, January 20, 1992.

<sup>33</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, January 25, 1991 and April 16, 1992.

<sup>34</sup> Lou Cannon, *Official Negligence: How Rodney King and the Riots Changed Los Angeles and the LAPD* (New York: Times Books, 1997), 173.



Ice Cube had warned in “Black Korea,” “So pay respect to the Black fist / Or we’ll burn your store, right down to a crisp.” His lyrics became a reality on April 29 when four LAPD officers were acquitted by a Simi Valley jury of charges stemming from the March 3, 1991, videotaped beating of Black motorist Rodney King, paroled after serving a year in the California Correctional Center at Susanville for the robbery of Korean grocer Tae Suck Baik in Monterey Park.<sup>35</sup> The verdicts unleashed a storm of fury that swept through the streets of Los Angeles from April 29 through May 4, 1992. According to the Webster Commission report that investigated the LAPD’s response to the riots, by the time Mayor Bradley lifted the dusk-to-dawn curfew on May 4, at least 42 people had died and 5,002 people had been arrested. The six-day riot caused an unprecedented amount of property loss, totaling \$1 billion, and inflicted an enormous amount of damage on the Los Angeles Korean community.<sup>36</sup>

Those who saw in the Los Angeles riots of 1992 a violent, disorganized and opportunistic mob tried to delegitimize the rioting by criminalizing the crowd and depoliticizing the analysis. Los Angeles news media portrayed participants in the riots as “hooligans,” “thugs,” “criminals,” and “gangbangers.”<sup>37</sup> As Darnell M. Hunt pointed out, “helicopter journalism” extensively employed “the vocabulary of crime” during the 1992 riots.<sup>38</sup> The media reproduced

---

<sup>35</sup> Staff of the Los Angeles Times, *Understanding the Riots: Los Angeles before and after the Rodney King Case* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Times, 1992), 34.

<sup>36</sup> William H. Webster and Hubert Williams, *The City in Crisis: A Report by the Special Advisor to the Board of Police Commissioners on the Civil Disorder in Los Angeles*, (Los Angeles: Office of the Special Advisor to the Board of Police Commissioners, October 21, 1992), 23, 26.

<sup>37</sup> Victor M. Valle and Rodolfo D. Torres, *Latino Metropolis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 59; Edward T. Chang and Jeannette Diaz-Veizades, *Ethnic Peace in the American City: Building Community in Los Angeles and Beyond* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 60.

<sup>38</sup> Darnell M. Hunt, *Screening the Los Angeles “Riots”: Race, Seeing, and Resistance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 157.

a “riffraff” theory that had condemned participants in the 1960s riots as “the young, unattached, unskilled, unemployed, uprooted, and criminal.”<sup>39</sup> The media also reiterated Edward C. Banfield’s thesis arguing that young men with “animal” spirits were motivated not by any political grievances but by their quest for “fun and profit” during the ghetto riots of the 1960s.<sup>40</sup>

Such codes of criminalization and depoliticization, inscribed in the narrative produced by the news media on the Los Angeles streets, were incorporated into and redistributed by academic works. For example, Peter A. Morrison and Ira S. Lowry, writing for Rand Corporation, maintained that large numbers of the unemployed or criminal “with time on their hands” participated in the riots “for fun or profit.” The rioters were denounced as just looters who had “the physical energy needed to stone, loot, burn, and run from the police” without any obvious political purpose.<sup>41</sup> Codes of criminalization and depoliticization were also incorporated into a riot narrative by politicians without undergoing any serious revision. On the third day of the riots, for instance, President George Bush denied any political aspects of the riots, stating that “What we saw last night and the night before in Los Angeles is not about civil rights. It’s not about the great cause of equality that all Americans must uphold. It’s not a message of protest. It’s been the brutality of a mob, pure and simple.”<sup>42</sup> Less than two months after the riots, the California Senate Office of Research also blamed the rioting on criminals by emphasizing prior criminal

---

<sup>39</sup> Robert M. Fogelson, *Violence as Protest: A Study of Riots and Ghettos* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1971), 27.

<sup>40</sup> Edward C. Banfield, *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and the Future of Our Urban Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970 [1968]), 185-187.

<sup>41</sup> Peter A. Morrison and Ira S. Lowry, *A Riot of Color: The Demographic Setting of Civil Disturbance in Los Angeles*, RAND Corporation Paper, P-7819 (1993), 18, 26.

<sup>42</sup> George Bush, “Address to the Nation on the Civil Disturbances in Los Angeles, California,” *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, May 4, 1992, 752.

activities of persons arrested during the riots and recommended that penalties and sanctions for looting and arson be strengthened.<sup>43</sup> Lastly, these codes were also woven into languages of conservative policies voiced by politicians and policy analysts. In particular, lack of personal responsibility and dependence on welfare were highlighted as being responsible for spawning the pathological criminal class. Even supposed liberals such as Democratic presidential candidate Bill Clinton converged with conservatives in demanding “greater responsibility” from the impoverished class.<sup>44</sup>

Of course some of the rioters had criminal backgrounds, some of them indiscriminately destroyed everything in their paths, and some even killed innocent passers-by. But it was difficult to deny that the rioting had political dimensions as an act of direct confrontation with symbols of power and as a selective protest. Blacks hurled rocks and bricks at police officers and vehicles that symbolized a repressive state apparatus, or perhaps even an occupying army in their community. Especially in the downtown area, as Michael Hardt explained, some hundreds of young people, many of whom were already highly politicized in their protests against the Gulf War or U.S. interventions in Central America, waged a “downtown revolt” by attacking symbols of political power such as LAPD headquarters and civic offices.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Senate Office of Research, *The South-Central Los Angeles and Koreatown Riots: A Study of Civil Unrest* (Sacramento, California: Senate Office of Research, 1992), 6; Senate Office of Research, *Options for Action: Presented to Senate Special Task Force on a New Los Angeles* (Sacramento, California: Senate Office of Research, 1992), 3. See also Senate Special Task Force on a New Los Angeles, *New Initiatives for a New Los Angeles: Final Report and Recommendations* (Sacramento, California: Senate Publications, 1992), 13-14, and 43.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, “The Los Angeles ‘Race Riot’ and Contemporary U.S. Politics,” in Robert Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 98. For criticism of welfare dependence and emphasis on personal responsibility by politicians and policy analysts, see George Bush, “Remarks to Community Leaders in Los Angeles,” *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, May 11, 1992, 809-810; United States Presidential Task Force on Los Angeles Recovery, *Action Plan* (Washington, D.C.: The Task Force, 1992).

<sup>45</sup> Michael Hardt, “The Rainbow War,” *Left Curve*, No. 17 (1993), 12. For the political dimension of the attacks against the police, see Manning Marable, *Beyond Black and White: Transforming African-American Politics* (London: Verso, 1996), 181.

Was the rioting in South Central Los Angeles a revolt against the establishment's political power? According to some, the rioting in South Central Los Angeles was not a premeditated and strategic revolt but instead, a tragic and spontaneous expression of powerlessness.<sup>46</sup> However, if the riots were spontaneous, it was only because there were no political vehicles through which the discontent of the powerless could be organized and articulated. Progressive political groups such as labor unions and revolutionary Black nationalist organizations were either not speaking to the needs and frustrations of the Black community or did not exist in a powerful form.

Even if the riots were spontaneous, the actions of participants in the rioting were not always random and senseless. British Marxist historian E. P. Thompson argued in his study of eighteenth century food riots in England that rioters' grievances "operated within a popular consensus" based on collective and traditional moral assumptions about legitimate and illegitimate economic practices. A violation of these moral beliefs and customs, referred to by Thompson as a "moral economy of the poor," inspired the hungry to act collectively. A shared moral economy enabled the food rioters to refrain from indiscriminate and wholesale destruction by providing them with "a sophisticated pattern of collective behavior."<sup>47</sup> During the Los Angeles riots of 1992, although rioters were not organized by any discernible political groupings, their collective actions were structured in a conspicuous pattern. According to Harlan Hahn,

---

<sup>46</sup> Sam Marcy, *A Marxist Defense of the L.A. Rebellion* (New York: World View Forum, 1992), 13; bell hooks, "Let Freedom Ring," in Haki R. Madhubuti, ed., *Why L.A. Happened: Implications of the '92 Los Angeles Rebellion* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1993), 243; Lisa Durán, Bill Gallegos, Eric Mann, Glenn Omatsu, eds., *Derechos Humanos para los Inmigrantes/Immigrant Rights and Wrongs* (Los Angeles: Labor/Community Strategy Center, 1994), 30; Min Hyoung Song, *Strange Future: Pessimism and the 1992 Los Angeles Riots* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 15.

<sup>47</sup> E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: The New Press, 1993), 188 and 266.

targets of arson and looting were selected based on “the nature of the merchandise sold, the race or ethnicity of the owner or employees, and the reputation or relationship of the business with community.”<sup>48</sup> In particular, as demonstrated in the first chapter of this study, liquor stores had become symbolic of enslavement and oppression even before Korean immigrants had become the majority of liquor store owners in South Central Los Angeles. Of course, not every Black resident in South Central Los Angeles had the same degree of moral concerns about liquor stores, but for many in the Black community, the economic traffic in liquor stores represented an immoral economic practice and an outrage to traditional moral beliefs. With the massive transfer of liquor store ownership to Korean merchants, liquor stores increasingly became a place where the moral outrage of Blacks over alcohol selling and their racial hostility toward Korean merchants were intertwined and reinforced each other. Such an intertwining of moral outrage and racial hostility was enhanced by the shooting deaths of Latasha Harlins and Lee Arthur Mitchell by Korean liquor store owners. Rioters behaved in a discernible pattern of collective behavior consistent with this intertwined anger and hostility, and Korean businesses were a disproportionate target for destruction and looting during the riots.

The violence that began on April 29 has often been described as an extension of ongoing conflicts between Blacks and Koreans. However, it is a reductionist illusion of causality that understands the riots only in terms of interethnic conflicts. “The explanation of historical phenomena,” to borrow an Althusserian account of contradiction and overdetermination, “is in the last analysis never reducible to a single or uniform causality.”<sup>49</sup> Althusser had analyzed that

---

<sup>48</sup> Harlan Hahn, “The Civil Uprising and Intra-Urban Governance,” in George O. Totten III and H. Eric Schockman, eds., *Community in Crisis: The Korean American Community after the Los Angeles Civil Unrest of April 1992* (Los Angeles: Center for Multiethnic and Transnational Studies, University of Southern California, 1994), 100. See also Harlan Hahn, “Los Angeles and the Future: Uprisings, Identity, and New Institutions,” in Michael J. Dear, H. Eric Schockman, and Greg Hise, eds., *Rethinking Los Angeles* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1996), 80-81.

<sup>49</sup> Étienne Balibar, “Structural Causality, Overdetermination, and Antagonism,” in Antonio Callari and David F.

an accumulation and exacerbation of contradictions had rendered Tsarist Russia the weakest link in the imperialist chain.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, no monocausal relationship existed in 1992 between the conflicts and the riots. The Los Angeles riots were a result of a fusion of accumulated and exacerbated contradictions that were heterogeneous and nonequivalent into “a ruptural unity.”

Although there were no modern day equivalents to the Bolsheviks and their revolutionary ideology in Los Angeles, all the possible contradictions caused by demographic change, police brutality, private/public disinvestment, interethnic tensions, and urban restructuring processes of deindustrialization and reindustrialization in the city had accumulated and exacerbated to such an extent that they rendered Los Angeles the weakest link in an American urban landscape that would rupture on April 29, 1992.<sup>51</sup> Consistent with this analysis, David O. Sears insisted that what happened in Los Angeles in the spring of 1992 was “several

---

Ruccio, eds., *Postmodern Materialism and the Future of Marxist Theory: Essays in the Althusserian Tradition* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 115.

<sup>50</sup> Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 97-100.

<sup>51</sup> The weakest urban link was expected by some progressives to light the fuse that would start riots across the nation as in the late 1960s. For instance, Mike Davis wrote that the Los Angeles riots of 1992 “produced an enormous manifestation of solidarity across the country.” He thought that the spring of 1992 was a recapitulation of the 1960s. Much to his disappointment, however, the 1992 riots were largely contained within Los Angeles and its neighboring cities for several reasons. Firstly, according to historian Michael B. Katz, boundary conflicts within cities decreased significantly as Whites fled to the suburbs. Such a decline of boundary conflicts led to the erosion of a major source of urban riots. Secondly, the 1992 riots also failed to ignite subsequent riots in many American cities because, according to Katz, America has developed five crucial mechanisms for managing marginalization since the 1960s: “selective incorporation; ostensible, or mimetic, reform; indirect rule; consumption; and repression and surveillance,” all of which contributed to depoliticization that reduced the likelihood of collective action. In particular, Katz argued that membership of what Lizabeth Cohen calls the “Consumers’ Republic” has significantly depoliticized Blacks by pushing them to pursue consumption, rather than the “politics of common goods.” Lastly, Katz extends his discussion to include a comparison between France and the United States, bearing in mind the Paris riots of 2005. The massive immigration of low-skilled workers created the potential for urban unrest in both French and American cities, but whereas France pursued a “relentless policy of nationalization,” the United States kept the potential for disruption locked up by incorporating immigrants “into the life of the nation” on the one hand and by severely controlling undocumented immigrants on the other hand. See Mike Davis, “Los Angeles: The Fire This Time: Interview with Journalist Mike Davis,” *Socialist Worker* (May, 1992), 8; Michael B. Katz, “Why Aren’t U.S. Cities Burning?” *Dissent*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (2007), 24; idem, “Why Don’t American Cities Burn Very Often?” *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (2008), 192. See also Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage, 2004), 188-189.

riots of different kinds occurring more or less simultaneously.”<sup>52</sup> In an interview with the *Covert Action Information Bulletin*, Mike Davis also called the events a “hybrid” revolt into which three different contradictions were fused together:

In any case, you can't reduce the events to a single essence---one major characteristic or identity. L.A. was a hybrid social revolt with three major dimensions. It was a revolutionary democratic protest characteristic of African-American history when demands for equal rights have been thwarted by the major institutions. It was also a major postmodern bread riot---an uprising of not just poor people but particularly of those strata of poor [especially, Latino immigrants from Mexico and Central America] in southern California who've been most savagely affected by the [1990-1992] recession. Thirdly, it was an interethnic conflict---particularly the systematic destroying and uprooting of Korean stores in the Black community.

So it was all of those things at once and issues of rage, class, and race cannot be separated out. Sometimes they coalesced, sometimes they were parallel in time and space.<sup>53</sup>

### Gun-toting vigilantes

The Los Angeles riots of 1992 were sometimes considered a replay of the 1960s. In the aftermath of the 1992 riots, former U.S. Congressman Craig A. Washington (D-TX) even dismissed the need for further investigation into urban riots, noting that the *Kerner Commission Report* already suggested solutions to urban problems more than two decades ago.<sup>54</sup> Indeed,

---

<sup>52</sup> David O. Sears, “Urban Rioting in Los Angeles: A Comparison of 1965 and 1992,” in Mark Baldassare, ed., *The Los Angeles Riots: Lessons for the Urban Future* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 251.

<sup>53</sup> Mike Davis, “LA: The Fire This Time,” *Covert Action Information Bulletin*, No. 41 (1992), 12. The interview was reprinted in Robert Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 142-154.

<sup>54</sup> Dennis E. Gale, *Understanding Urban Unrest: From Reverend King to Rodney King* (Thousand Oaks, California:

given that urban poverty and police brutality were pointed out as important causes for urban riots of the 1960s and 1992, the Congressman's idea may have some validity. However, as manifested by multiracial participation in the burning and looting of Korean-owned stores, the Los Angeles riots of 1992 presaged a significant change in urban riots, one that cannot be reducible to the binary schema of American racial politics in the 1960s.

Korean immigrants in Los Angeles suffered tremendous damage from the riots. According to an analysis by Paul Ong and Suzanne Hee of a victim list compiled by the *Korea Central Daily*, the total number of Korean-owned stores that were burned or looted was more than two thousand (460 stores in Koreatown, 761 stores in South Central Los Angeles, and 852 stores in all other outlying areas), comprising about half of the total businesses damaged or destroyed. Korean merchants in Los Angeles sustained \$359 million in damage.<sup>55</sup> The riots claimed the life of an eighteen-year-old Korean American who was mistaken for a looter and shot to death by one of the Korean vigilantes defending a Korean-owned store in Koreatown.

Although Korean Americans endured immense losses, insult was added to injury when they were blamed for being responsible for the riots. Koreans were infuriated by television news framing the riots as a battle between Blacks and Koreans. In this frame, Korean Americans were

---

Sage, 1996), 114.

<sup>55</sup> Paul Ong and Suzanne Hee, *Losses in the Los Angeles Civil Unrest, April 29-May 1, 1992: Lists of the Damaged Properties* (Los Angeles: UCLA Center for Pacific Rim Studies, 1993), 12. To make matters worse, the majority (65%) of Korean business owners were uninsured, making it difficult for them to recover their damages. Even those who were insured were prone to underinsurance policies issued by non-admitted carriers because of redlining practiced by many admitted carriers. See Korean American Inter-Agency Council, *KAIAC Press Packet: Korean American Inter-Agency Council Announces Results of a Comprehensive Survey Assessing Situation of Korean American Victims Ten Months after the 1992 LA Riots*, March 8, 1993, 5. While non-admitted carriers were able to sell some limited types of insurance policies referred to as surplus lines, they were not subject to the supervisory authority of the California Department of Insurance and their policies were not protected by state guarantee funds. See John S. C. Kim and Sung J. Hwang, "The Korean American Bar Association and the Riot," in George O. Totten III and H. Eric Schockman, eds., *Community in Crisis: The Korean American Community after the Los Angeles Civil Unrest of April 1992* (Los Angeles: Center for Multiethnic and Transnational Studies, University of Southern California, 1994), 124.



portrayed as indiscriminate and dehumanized gun-toting toughs with blood in their eyes seeking only to protect their businesses. For example, on the second day of the riots, ABC's news show *Nightline*, anchored by Ted Koppel, portrayed Korean shopkeepers as those who had no respect for the lives of others.

Judy Muller, ABC News: [voice- over] [technical difficulty] ...the violence was on the rise. Firefighters, often the targets of violence themselves, could not keep up with the arson fires. National Guard troops were deployed in the troubled areas to reinforce the police, but even all that law enforcement didn't stop the looting, or the vigilante attempts to stop the looting. These Korean shop owners defended their property with bullets. More than 100 Korean businesses have been looted or burned since last night.

1st Korean American shop owner: We have a lot of shotguns in here, and some handguns, but we have to use them, because, I mean, we have to defend our lives, we have to defend our property. You know, people out there watching, you know, please don't just sit there and enjoy this great exhibition-

2nd Korean American shop owner: It is not entertainment, you know, it's not a Hollywood action shot.<sup>56</sup>

In the above report from Judy Muller, an award winning reporter for her coverage of the 1992 riots, three groups of people emerged as major players: rioters who looted and committed arson; gun-toting Korean vigilantes who were willing to use firearms against the rioters; and law enforcement officers "neutrally" deployed to prevent these two group from acting against each other. The riots were thus framed as an extension of the aggravated relations between Blacks and Koreans. In the rest of her report, Muller did not seek to explain the structural causes of the rioting. Rather, she continued to sensationalize the riots by erroneously reporting that Reginald

---

<sup>56</sup> "Rioting Follows King Verdict," *Nightline*, ABC News, April 30, 1992, Retrieved June 14, 2010 from the Nexis TV and Radio Broadcast Transcripts.

Denny, a White truck driver who was pulled from his truck at the intersection of Florence and Normandie in South Central and severely beaten by four rioters (later known as the “LA Four”), had died from his injuries. Reversing the racial politics of what had happened to Rodney King, Whites were portrayed as victims and as outsiders to American racial mayhem. Muller presented the voice of an elderly White resident who complained about not being able to purchase food: “This is the United States. How come they let that happen to the place? Why didn’t they guard- they’re all running out of there with the food. I’ve got to do some shopping. I don’t have any food in the house.”

On the next day, *Nightline* continued to draw public attention to the Black-Korean conflicts by featuring Koppel’s foray into South Central Los Angeles and his interview with two Black gang members named “Little Monster” and “Bone” who criticized Koreans for “[t]aking money out of our community and not putting it back, disrespecting us and basically treating us bad.” Although a county probation officer refuted the Black-Korean framework at the end of the news show by saying that some Jewish young men wearing “yarmulkes” participated in the looting of stores, his voice was buried without much response.<sup>57</sup> Other television news shows did not differ significantly from ABC’s *Nightline*. For instance, *CBS Evening News*, anchored by Connie Chung on May 3, focused mainly on the Black-Korean conflicts as if there were a linear monocausal relationship between the riots and the conflicts.

Unidentified Man #1: The Koreans--actually they don’t give us black people any respect. We patronize them. We come in their stores. We purchase their items, but yet--and still--they still won’t talk to us and treat us like dogs.

Blackstone [CBS reporter]: Korean immigrants own many of the

---

<sup>57</sup> “Stop the Madness,” *Nightline*, ABC News, May 1, 1992, Retrieved June 14, 2010 from the Nexis TV and Radio Broadcast Transcripts.

stores in South Central Los Angeles. Resentment has built as these newcomers come in and do well. Some black leaders say the Koreans only take, they don't give back.

Walter Tucker (Mayor, Compton, California): There were no blacks hired in the Korean businesses. There were blacks treated very unfairly: "What? What you want! You--you--what you want?"--that kind of thing. And so there was a method to the madness that was out here. I'm not saying I condone it, but I understand it, and I understand the--the--the outrage of the people.

Unidentified Man #2 [Korean American]: We will fight you and rise like a phoenix from these very ashes created by you devils!<sup>58</sup>

### Melodramatic imagination of the riots

In response to the riots, Korean Americans developed a counternarrative that owed much to a melodramatic imagination, enabling suffering victims to make sense of the world around them and their place in it, and to lay claim to innocence. According to Peter Brooks, melodrama, as a product of the French Revolution that marked the dissolution of the sacred (and its institutions such as the church and the monarchy), sought to resacralize the desacralized era in personal and individual terms. Melodrama reintroduced "the menace of evil and the eventual triumph of morality" through a highly personalized confrontation between good and evil.<sup>59</sup> Powerless victims were cast as important melodramatic figures to represent a personification of good. Weak and helpless victims were represented as innocents in melodramas, and their suffering was understood in the melodramatic imagination as a means to recognize who was innocent. Indeed, their painful experiences were required to insure the ultimate triumph of good

---

<sup>58</sup> "Los Angeles Violence Seems To Be Aimed at Korean Businesses," *CBS Evening News*, CBS News, May 3, 1992, Retrieved January 11, 2009 from the Nexis TV and Radio Broadcast Transcripts.

<sup>59</sup> Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 15.

and morality.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, according to the imagination, the victims suffered not because of their own faults. Instead, as Libby Anker has suggested, the melodramatic imagination traced their suffering “to the external environment.”<sup>61</sup>

By appropriating the melodramatic imagination, Korean Americans made sense of their experiences of the riots and began to tell their own stories under the title of “*Sa-I-Gu P’oktong*.”<sup>62</sup> According to their stories, the Los Angeles riots of 1992 were, first of all, a protest triggered by the Rodney King verdict. The riots were symbolized as a protest by Blacks against racial injustice practiced by dominant institutions of White society, of which Koreans clearly were not a part. In short, the event was a clash between Blacks and Whites with Korean Americans unluckily positioned as innocent victims in the middle of the battle.

With numerous foreign incursions having occurred throughout Korean history, Korean migrants recently from the Korean peninsula had a deep reservoir of memories to develop such a narrative. What happened in Los Angeles in 1992 was, for many older Koreans in the United States, strongly reminiscent of the devastating Korean War, where Koreans understood themselves as caught in the middle of a war between the Soviet Union and the United States. Returning to a traumatic, collective memory, Korean Americans reframed the riots as a war of

---

<sup>60</sup> For the melodramatic understanding of suffering victims, see Martha Vicinus, “‘Helpless’ and ‘Unfriended’: Nineteenth-Century Domestic Melodrama,” *New Literary History*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (1981), 130; Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O. J. Simpson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 29; David Grimsted, “Melodrama as Echo of the Historically Voiceless,” in Tamara K. Hareven, ed., *Anonymous Americans: Explorations in Nineteenth-Century Social History* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 84; Daniel C. Gerould, “The Americanization of Melodrama,” in Daniel C. Gerould, ed., *American Melodrama* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1983), 28.

<sup>61</sup> Libby Anker, “The Melodramatic Imagination and American Political Life,” Conference Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Political Science Association, Las Vegas, Nevada, March 8, 2007, Retrieved April 21, 2009 from Academic Search Premier database.

<sup>62</sup> “Sa-I-Gu” means literally 4-2-9 or April 29, referring to the first day of the riots. Since the early twentieth century, it has been a convention for Koreans to use the numbers of the date for naming major political events. “P’oktong” in Korean means a riot.

other parties and, in referring to a well-known Korean proverb, likened themselves to an innocent shrimp caught in a fight between two whales.<sup>63</sup> Or, as did one Korean American poet, they portrayed themselves as “sitting ducks”: “Certainly, so many Korean merchants caught in the middle / Middle of the Black and White issue / Most merchants were helpless like sitting ducks.”<sup>64</sup>

In doing so, they displaced the discourse of racial and ethnic politics and privileged geography, suggesting that they were “at a wrong time, at a wrong place.”<sup>65</sup> In this understanding, Korean Americans were not targeted by Blacks, but instead, sustained enormous damage because their businesses were located just in and around the center of rioting. Since some parts of the “middleman minority” thesis pointed to a “buffer” role of minority merchants between dominant and subordinate groups, the thesis was selectively appropriated by many Korean Americans to emphasize the vulnerability of Koreatown’s location along the 10 Freeway between the economically struggling Black community to the south and the affluent White community to the north. Ten years after *Sa-I-Gu*, this geographical explanation was so widely accepted by Korean Americans that when Ellis Cha, president of the Korean American Grocers Association, was asked whether Korean merchants still felt as if they were targeted by Blacks, he answered, “No, Korean people has never been a target from the black community, to be hit list.

---

<sup>63</sup> For an example of Korean Americans’ comparison of the riots to the Korean War, see Kichung Kim, “Can We All Get Along?” in Wendy L. Ng, eds., *Reviewing Asian America: Locating Diversity* (Pullman, Washington: Washington State University Press, 1995), 109.

<sup>64</sup> Sae Lee, “Barahm,” in Edward T. Chang and Russell C. Leong, eds., *Los Angeles: Struggles toward Multiethnic Community* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 130.

<sup>65</sup> Chan-Hie Kim, “Söngsörül Tonghae Pon Sa-I-Gu Sat’aewa Miju An-üi Hanindül [The Sa-I-Gu Riots and Korean Americans from a Biblical Perspective],” in Sung Do Kang, ed., P’oktonginya Hangjaenginya [*Riots or Uprising*] (Seoul: Korean Caucus, Cal-Pac Annual Conference of UMC, 1994), 44. See also Sun Joo Lee, ed., *Sa-I-Gu P’oktong Paeksö: L.A. Soyo Sat’aeüi Chosa Mit Chinsil Kyumyöng [White Paper of Sa-I-Gu Riots: Research and Investigation into the Los Angeles Riots of 1992]* (Los Angeles: Sa-I-Gu Association, 2002), 62 and 92.

We happen to be here during the riot. The riot broke out with the Rodney King judgment, but it broke out, but Korean merchant happen to be here [sic].”<sup>66</sup>

The Korean American *p’oktong* melodrama did not close when Korean Americans transfigured themselves from inhumane and disrespectful aggressors into innocent victims. In order to dramatically emphasize their innocence and injury, they had to be not just accidental victims but also scapegoats that would deflect blame from those actually responsible for the riots. As Angela Oh, a prominent Korean American attorney who emerged as a spokesperson for the post-riot Korean American community, insisted on ABC aired on May 6, 1991, “...I want to make very clear that I’m talking about scapegoating. We aren’t victims. Make no mistake. Koreans do not view themselves, Korean Americans do not view themselves as victims. We are being scapegoated, we know it. We are being scapegoated.”<sup>67</sup>

Every scapegoat is a victim, but not every victim is a scapegoat. Scapegoating designates a specific type of victimization, suggesting that an innocent victim is consciously chosen by a society in crisis in order to avert the threat of further crisis.<sup>68</sup> Calling attention to being scapegoated is an effort to discursively highlight the innocence of the unjustly accused victim. In the second act of the Korean American melodrama, the community represented itself as the scapegoat. In this lens, enduring racial animosity between Blacks and Whites was reconfigured into an extension of more recent Black-Korean conflicts.<sup>69</sup> Racial injustice was a

---

<sup>66</sup> “Tenth Anniversary of LA Riots,” *Talk of the Nation*, National Public Radio, April 29, 2002, Retrieved January 10, 2009 from the Nexis TV and Radio Broadcast Transcripts.

<sup>67</sup> “Two Facets of the Los Angeles Riots,” *Nightline*, ABC News, May 6, 1992, Retrieved January 1, 2009 from the Nexis TV and Radio Broadcast Transcripts.

<sup>68</sup> René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987; reprint, New York: Continuum, 2003), 25.

<sup>69</sup> Kwang Chung Kim, “Introduction,” in Kwang Chung Kim, ed., *Koreans in the Hood: Conflict with African Americans* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 1. See also Sun Joo Lee, ed., *Sa-I-Gu P’oktong*

chronic American problem that predated the mass immigration of Koreans to the United States. Koreans thus “had no part in creating” the battle, whose root causes of conflict existed well before Koreans came on the scene. Even if the riots were caused by urban poverty, Korean Americans insisted that they “neither created nor had any control over” it.<sup>70</sup> In this melodrama, after insisting on their irrelevance to the battle between Blacks and Whites, Korean Americans narrativized the riots as being deliberately transformed by a White power structure into a Black-Korean conflict in order to avert the real threat of crisis between Blacks and Whites.

Korean Americans were especially critical toward what they viewed as White, mainstream media scapegoating of Koreans as a legitimate target for Black rage. Progressive Korean Americans saw such press reports as “media fabrication,” deployed as a recognizable “divide and conquer” tactic.<sup>71</sup> In a similar vein, Korean Americans suspected that the White-dominated media maliciously portrayed Korean Americans as “primary instigators of racism” against Blacks to appease White “guilt-ridden” conscience over racial injustice against Blacks.<sup>72</sup> Journalist Kyung Won Lee, an ardent crusader against this media framing, called the riots

---

Paeksö: L.A. Soyo Sat‘aetü Chosa Mit Chinsil Kyumyöng [*White Paper of Sa-I-Gu Riots: Research and Investigation into the Los Angeles Riots of 1992*] (Los Angeles: Sa-I-Gu Association, 2002), 25, 93, 99, 114-115 and 127; *Hankook Ilbo*, May 4, 1992.

<sup>70</sup> Sumi K. Cho, “Korean Americans vs. African Americans: Conflict and Construction,” in Robert Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 201; Min Hyung Song, “*Sa-I-Gu* Revisited: Interview with Elaine Kim,” *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2004), 238; Bong Hwan Kim, “As American As Possible,” in Elaine H. Kim and Eui-Young Yu, eds., *East to America: Korean American Life Stories* (New York: The New Press, 1996), 348.

<sup>71</sup> Nancy Abelmann and John Lie, *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 152-154; John Lie and Nancy Abelmann, “The 1992 Los Angeles Riots and the ‘Black-Korean Conflict,’” in Kwang Chung Kim, ed., *Koreans in the Hood: Conflict with African Americans* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 76-77.

<sup>72</sup> Sumi K. Cho, op. cit., 204; Kyung Won Lee, “Urban Impressionist,” in Elaine H. Kim and Eui-Young Yu, eds., *East to America: Korean American Life Stories* (New York: The New Press, 1996), 17; idem, “Legacy of *Sa-ee-gu*: Goodbye *Hahn*, Good Morning, Community Conscience,” *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (1999), 48-50.

America's "first media-inspired urban pogrom."<sup>73</sup>

The rhetoric of "media bashing" was widely deployed by both Korean and Korean American scholars to understand the riots. However, as some non-Korean writers analyzed, the media representation of Korean Americans was rather ambivalent. Erna Smith noted that the Black-Korean conflicts were just "a secondary story line" in the local and network television news coverage, and that the primary story line focused on conflict between Blacks and Whites, just as the media did during urban riots of the late 1960s. According to Smith, Korean immigrants were not always portrayed as disrespectful aggressors, but instead, often depicted as property owners who were victimized by rioters.<sup>74</sup> Despite the possibility of countervailing evidence, Korean and Korean American scholars have largely devoted their research energies toward examining negative media images of Korean Americans, further emphasizing the media's responsibility for the damage inflicted on the Korean American community.<sup>75</sup>

The police did not escape blame in the narrative of the Korean American *p'oktong*

---

<sup>73</sup> Kyung Won Lee, "Sa-I-Gu: A Haunting Prelude to the Fire Next Time," *KoreAm Journal* (April, 2002), 26.

<sup>74</sup> Erna Smith, "Transmitting Race: The Los Angeles Riot in Television News," Research Paper R-11, Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 1994, 7 and 10. See also Lisa C. Ikemoto, "Traces of the Master Narrative in the Story of African American/Korean American Conflict: How We Constructed 'Los Angeles,'" *Southern California Law Review*, Vol. 66 (May, 1993); Michael C. Thornton and Hemant Shah, "US News Magazine Images of Black-Asian American Relationship, 1980-1992," *The Communication Review*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1996); João H. Costa Vargas, "The *Los Angeles Times*' Coverage of the 1992 Rebellion," *Ethnicities*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2004).

<sup>75</sup> For example, see Eui-Young Yu, "Community-based Disaster Management: The Case of Los Angeles Koreatown during the April 29 Riots," in Ho-Youn Kwon, ed., *Korean Americans: Conflict and Harmony* (Chicago: Center for Korean Studies, North Park College and Theological Seminary, 1994); Doobo Shim, "The Logic of Television News: The Case of the Los Angeles Riots," in Molefi Kete Asante and Eungjun Min, eds., *Socio-Cultural Conflict between African American and Korean American* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2000); Hyun Ban and R. C. Adams, "L.A. Times Coverage of Korean Americans before, after 1992 Riots," *Newspaper Research Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 3-4 (Summer/Fall, 1997); Minjeong Kim, "Silencing the Voice of the Minority: Revisiting the Media Coverage of the 1992 Civil Disturbance in Los Angeles," *Asian Communication Research*, No. 3 (2007); Hyunsuk Yoo, "Korean Americans and African Americans in the Los Angeles Riots: A Study of the Rhetoric of Conflict," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1996; Kathy Sung-Ah Kwon, "The Case of Latasha Harlins and Soon Ja Du: A Critical Intervention in the Mediated Politics of Racialized Representations," M.A. thesis, California State University, Northridge, 1997.



melodrama. Koreans criticized the police for redirecting rioters' rage away from affluent White communities and toward a scapegoated Korean community. A large number of Korean Americans still believe that the police intentionally allowed the rioters to burn and destroy Koreatown in order to protect whiter and wealthier West Los Angeles and Beverly Hills. Korean Americans considered themselves as prey offered by the LAPD to rioters in an effort to sate their appetite for destruction.<sup>76</sup> Korean Americans tended to believe that they were abandoned by the police because they were Koreans and not Whites. As one Korean American woman said on the verge of tears at a community meeting held by the Webster Commission after the riots,

I called the police many times at home. I said, 'Please come, protect our business, this is our only business.' They never answered. Okay. They never come... This is a Korean store, Korean area, Korean people area. Maybe they didn't much concern about it. I heard a building here is---They go to the Beverly Hills and they stop there. That's why I so upset. Every time, after April 29th, I'm very upset."<sup>77</sup>

Tamara K. Nopper has suggested that the failure of law enforcement to protect Korean immigrant merchants may not have been because police simply lacked concern for Koreans, but because in the tumult of a massive riot, the bureaucratically dysfunctional LAPD could not

---

<sup>76</sup> "Koreatown Hit Hard by Los Angeles Riots," *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio, May 1, 1992, Retrieved January 10, 2009 from the Nexis TV and Radio Broadcast Transcripts; "The New Korean Americans," *Which Way, LA?* KCRW (National Public Radio Station of Santa Monica Junior College), July 8, 1992, folder 20, box 1, Which Way, LA? Collection; Sumi K. Cho, "Korean Americans vs. African Americans: Conflict and Construction," in Robert Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 197, 201; Edward T. Chang's special contribution to the *Hankook Ilbo*, May 6, 1992. See also the *Hankook Ilbo* city desk reporters' commentaries on the riots, *Hankook Ilbo*, May 7, 1992 and the same ethnic newspaper's nineteen page special feature on the riots, titled "Sa-I-Gu P'oktong T'ükchip: P'oktong Kūhu [Special Feature on Sa-I-Gu Riots: The Aftermath of the Riots]," *Hankook Ilbo*, May 23, 1992.

<sup>77</sup> "Community Meeting No. 4," Berendo Junior High School, September 11, 1992, folder: Community Meeting Transcript #4, box 23/24, Papers of the Webster Commission.

properly deploy their forces to maximum effectiveness.<sup>78</sup> Bert Useem has similarly argued that the Los Angeles Police Department was not able to respond quickly to the rioting because it failed to establish a single command structure at the epicenter of the riots. Useem believes that internecine strife, exacerbated by Police Chief Daryl Gates' impending retirement, in the LAPD contributed to the Department's inability to respond effectively to developing events.<sup>79</sup> Notwithstanding these analyses, the counternarrative in which Korean Americans were intentionally abandoned by law enforcement agencies during the riots was widely accepted by Koreans and Korean Americans.<sup>80</sup> This narrative even crossed the Pacific to tap longstanding anti-American sentiments which existed among many, especially young South Koreans with progressive views. For example, Chōndaehyōp, a group of student activists advocating for national liberation of South Korea from U.S. imperialism and the reunification of South and North Korea, put up large posters featuring handwritten anti-American slogans on school walls, demanding that the United States address human rights violations at home before condemning

---

<sup>78</sup> Tamara K. Nopper, "The 1992 Los Angeles Riots and the Asian American Abandonment Narrative as Political Fiction," *New Centennial Review*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2006).

<sup>79</sup> Bert Useem, "The State and Collective Disorders: The Los Angeles Riot/Protest of April, 1992," *Social Forces*, Vol. 76, No. 2 (1997), 368, 371. For a chaotic, almost comic mobilization of law enforcement officers during the riots, see also Susan Rosegrant, "The Flawed Emergency Response to the 1992 Los Angeles Riots," John F. Kennedy School of Government Case Program (C16-00-1586.0; C16-00-1587.0; C16-00-1588.0), Harvard University, 2000. See especially C16-00-1587.0 and C16-00-1588.0.

<sup>80</sup> For example, see Kyung Won Lee and Ji Hyun Kim, "4.29 L.A. P'oktongūi Chinsilūl Ch'ajasō [Searching for the Truth about Sa-I-Gu L.A. Riots]," *Wōlganjosōn [Monthly Chosun]*, October, 2005, 490, 493; Jong Sang Park, former consul general of the Republic of Korea in Los Angeles, "LA Kyomin Sahoewa Ch'ongyōngsa [Korean Community in Los Angeles and the Consul General]," in Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trades, ed., *Oegyogwanūi Hoego [Recollections of Korean Diplomats]* (Seoul: Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trades, 2002), 284; June Sang Han, "Hūgin P'oktongūi Kūningwa Wōnin [Immediate and Remote Causes of the Black Riot]," *Segyewa Na [The World and Me]*, No. 32 (1992), 217-218; "LA Hūgin P'oktongi Namkin Kyohundūl [Lessons from the Black Riot in Los Angeles]," *Kidokkyo Sasang [Christian Thought]*, No. 402 (1992), 199; Juna Byun, "The Politicoeconomic Conspiracy of the 1992 Los Angeles Civil Unrest and Hwabyung, the Scapegoat Syndrome of Korean American Victims," *Chaeoe Hanin Yōn'gu [Studies of Koreans Abroad]*, No. 5 (1995), 153.

human rights problems in other countries, particularly in North Korea.<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup> *Chosun Ilbo*, May 5, 1992, Retrieved April 15, 2009 from the Korean Studies Information Service System. North Korea's human rights abuses were becoming a hot issue with the publication of *Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea* by Asia Watch and Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee in 1988. Three years later, the U.S. Department of State also criticized North Korea for denying "its citizens the most fundamental human rights." See United States Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1991* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1992), 887.

Figure 4: Untitled Cartoon by Dong Ho Moon, No. 1  
(Courtesy of Dong Ho Moon)



This untitled cartoon, illustrated by Korean American painter Dong Ho Moon, was printed on flyers distributed by young Korean Americans immediately after the Los Angeles riots of 1992. See “4.29: Sixteen Years Later: Voices from the Past and Present Continue the Dialogue,” *KoreAm Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (2008), 65. George H. W. Bush was satirized in the cartoon as the Statue of Liberty holding a torch of racism while Korean Americans were portrayed as a shield used by privileged Whites to avoid attack by rioters.

Figure 5: Untitled Cartoon by Dong Ho Moon, No. 2  
(Courtesy of Dong Ho Moon)



This untitled cartoon was also painted by Dong Ho Moon immediately after the Los Angeles riots of 1992. A “Satanized” Uncle Sam along with the mainstream media maliciously incite a fight between Blacks and Koreans as the police watch from afar.

### P'oktong melodrama urging alliance

Melodrama can be aesthetically deployed to polarize the world into good and evil for the ultimate purpose of demonstrating that in the face of evil's victory, that good would eventually triumph. This aesthetic form provides the powerless with a sense of agency and empowerment by enabling them to make sense of their experiences as a prelude to ultimate victory. In this way, the aesthetic form of the *p'oktong* melodrama enabled Korean Americans to imagine the world as a struggle between good and evil and to interpret their experiences within a framework of such a world.<sup>82</sup> For Korean Americans, as Dong Ho Moon's illustrations suggested, White society represented the evil that aggravated relations between Blacks and Koreans to avoid violence against Whites and perhaps to appease guilty White consciences.

The *p'oktong* melodrama urged Korean Americans to make an alliance with Blacks against a White society deemed as the ultimate victimizer of minorities in the United States. Of course, not every Korean Americans espoused such an alliance. Some Korean Americans did not hide their hatred against Blacks and advised their co-ethnic merchants to leave South Central Los Angeles as soon as possible. The *Hankook Ilbo* published a series of editorial comments likening Blacks to insane African Zulus and demanded an apology from the Black community for the destruction of Korean-owned stores. In a letter published on the Korean ethnic newspaper, Shawn Steel, husband of Michelle Park Steel who would later become a Korean American

---

<sup>82</sup> On the melodramatic aesthetic form as a means for interpreting experience, see Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 206. For discussions among historians about the melodramatic framing of the social, see Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 177-191; James Vernon, "Who's Afraid of the 'Linguistic Turn'? The Politics of Social History and Its Discontents," *Social History*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (January, 1994), 88-96; idem, "Notes toward an Introduction," in James Vernon, ed., *Re-reading the Constitution: New Narratives in the Political History of England's Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 14-15; and Rohan McWilliam, "Melodrama and the Historians," *Radical History Review*, No. 78 (2000), 57-84.

Republican leader, tapped into the fear of communism that pervades the psyches of first generation Korean immigrants, urging Korean Americans to blame the Black community for causing the riots and denouncing those who criticized mainstream society as “leftists.”<sup>83</sup>

Negative perceptions of Blacks were intensified when efforts of Korean merchants to rebuild their destroyed liquor outlets were opposed by the Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment (now known as simply Community Coalition), a local Black organization, with the support of prominent Black politicians including City Council Members Mark Ridley-Thomas and Rita Walters as well as State Assembly Member Marguerite Archie-Hudson.<sup>84</sup>

The *p’oktong* melodrama also deemphasized Black-Korean conflicts by enabling Korean Americans to develop a different image of Blacks. As Kyungjin Song has pointed out, Korean Americans began to develop a dual image of Blacks. On the one hand, Blacks were still perceived as destroying the Korean American Dream. On the other hand, Blacks were also perceived, like Korean Americans, as victims of racist oppression in White America. Framed as

---

<sup>83</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, May 5, May 7, May 9, May 12, and May 30, 1992.

<sup>84</sup> Raphael J. Sonenshein, “The Battle over Liquor Stores in South Central Los Angeles: The Management of an Interminority Conflict,” *Urban Affairs Review*, Vol. 31, No. 6 (1996), 721-722. During the Los Angeles riots of 1992, approximately 200 liquor stores were destroyed. Korean merchants owned 175 of the 200 liquor stores. Due to severe rebuilding restrictions pushed for by the Community Coalition’s “Rebuild South Central Without Liquor Stores” campaign and supported by local politicians, only 10 Korean liquor stores were able to reopen during the following two years. See Edward J. W. Park, “Competing Visions: Political Formation of Korean Americans in Los Angeles, 1992-1997,” *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (1998), 51-52; idem, “The Impact of Mainstream Political Mobilization on Asian American Communities: The Case of Korean Americans in Los Angeles, 1992-1998,” in Gordon H. Chang, ed., *Asian Americans and Politics: Perspectives, Experiences, Prospects* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 283; and Angie Y. Chung, *Legacies of Struggle: Conflict and Cooperation in Korean American Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 100-101. While the anti-liquor store campaign was primarily to curtail the prevalence of liquor outlets, regardless of their ownership, according to Regina Freer, it was nevertheless also waged by those “who were particularly disturbed by increasing Korean ownership of alcohol outlets in the area.” See Regina Freer, “From Conflict to Convergence: Interracial Relations in the Liquor Store Controversy in South Central Los Angeles,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1999, 50. For the anti-liquor store campaign, see also Kyeyoung Park, “The Morality of a Commodity: A Case Study of ‘Rebuilding L.A. without Liquor Stores,’” *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (1995/1996); idem, “Confronting the Liquor Industry in Los Angeles,” *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, Vol. 24, No. 7/8 (2004).

such, they were considered a potential partner in an alliance against a common enemy.<sup>85</sup>

Drawing on their own tragic national history, some Koreans emphasized that Blacks and Koreans should use “a common heritage of oppression” to “empathize with each other’s sorrow and anguish.”<sup>86</sup> Some readers of the *Hankook Ilbo* wrote letters to the editor urging for solidarity with Blacks to overcome divide-and-conquer strategies practiced by the dominant group.<sup>87</sup>

Messages on placards carried by Korean Americans at a massive peace march through Koreatown in May 1992 reflected efforts to deemphasize the Black-Korean conflicts: “Justice for Rodney King,” “Justice for All People of Color,” and “More Jobs for the Inner-City.”<sup>88</sup> By developing a more complex image of Blacks, Korean Americans tried to heal the wounds caused by Black-Korean conflicts, although their efforts were occasionally rebuffed by some Blacks who warned that if Korean Americans wanted to “prevent the next burning,” that they should not forget “the manner in which they treated Afro-Americans prior to the riot.”<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> Kyungjin Song, “Two Tales of an American City: Portrayal of African American and Korean American Relations in Two Ethnic Newspapers between 1991 and 1993, The *Los Angeles Sentinel* and the *Korea Times*,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 1997, 174-175.

<sup>86</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, May 12, 1992.

<sup>87</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, May 9, 1992. Many Korean Americans accused the media of media framing that resulted in a “divide-and-conquer” dynamic. Blacks also heavily criticized media coverage of the riots, and on June 4, 1992, the leading Black local paper, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, published Angela E. Oh’s letter criticizing the media’s strategy to pit minorities against each other. However, as indicated in an editorial of the Los Angeles’ leading Black newspaper, Blacks tended to criticize the media from different angles. They focused largely on the media’s ignorance of “political and socioeconomic backdrop” of the riots and the media’s “racist” representation of Black and Latino looters as “thugs” and “animals.” See *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 25, 1992.

<sup>88</sup> Edward J. W. Park, “Competing Visions: Political Formation of Korean Americans in Los Angeles, 1992-1997,” *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (1998), 48; idem, “The Impact of Mainstream Political Mobilization on Asian American Communities: The Case of Korean Americans in Los Angeles, 1992-1998,” in Gordon H. Chang, ed., *Asian Americans and Politics: Perspectives, Experiences, Prospects* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 280.

<sup>89</sup> *Los Angeles Sentinel*, May 28, 1992. It should be noted that there were conflicting views among Blacks on the destruction of Korean-owned stores. Some Blacks, like Larry Aubry, criticized “a strange, perhaps telling, silence” of Black leaders on the violence against Korean Americans during the riots, suggesting that Black leadership was wary of being called “anti-Black,” “pro-Korean,” or “selling-out.” See *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 11, 1992.



### Lacunae in the Korean American melodramatic languages

In response to the charge that Korean Americans were responsible for the violence perpetrated against them, the Korean American *p'oktong* melodrama counterframed the riots into an explosion that represented the state of longstanding Black-White conflicts. In doing so, the *p'oktong* melodrama also urged Korean Americans to seek an alliance with Blacks against the White system. Importantly, the development of this counternarrative sought to remove any link between the Black-Korean conflicts and the Los Angeles riots of 1992. This erasure ignores that although the riots were triggered by the not-guilty verdict in the Rodney King beating case, they were nevertheless also an articulation of the pent-up resentment against Korean merchants. As Mike Davis wrote, while the Watts riots of 1965 were similar to a “hurricane” which swept through one hundred blocks in South Central Los Angeles, the 1992 riots were like a “tornado” which zigzagged through commercial streets in the Los Angeles Black community and beyond. The 1992 riots did not occur randomly but followed a “ruthlessly systematic” pattern of attacks that targeted Korean-owned businesses.<sup>90</sup>

In his analysis, Davis suggests that part of what drove Blacks to attack Korean American businesses was a collective social, political, and economic racial fantasy whereby Blacks could create space for the development of their own businesses by destroying Korean-owned stores.<sup>91</sup> Fantasy enabled some Blacks to imagine that the destruction directed at Korean-

---

<sup>90</sup> Mike Davis, *L.A. Was Just the Beginning - Urban Revolt in the United States: A Thousand Points of Light* (Westfield, New Jersey: Open Magazine Pamphlet Series, 1992), 5.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 6. See also Mike Davis, “L.A. Intifada: Interviews with Mike Davis,” *Social Text*, No. 33 (1992), 20 and 31; *idem*, “Los Angeles: The Fire This Time: Interview with Journalist Mike Davis,” *Socialist Worker* (May, 1992), 9.

owned stores would provide them with an opportunity to achieve economic uplift and self-sufficiency. As one Black female resident in Los Angeles said about the land where Korean businesses had once stood, “You know, this is our area—our area. I would tell you within—from this day, May 1st, until five to 10 years from now, this place is going to be so nice. All this—all this down here is going to be black-owned business. She going to have a nail shop. She going to have a beauty shop. It’s going to be our turn. It’s our turn now. We’re going to do it. We really are.”<sup>92</sup>

Twenty years later, this vision has obviously not come true. But acknowledging the enduring impact of systemic racism against Blacks does not mean that the engine driving the tornado that destroyed so many Korean businesses was not fueled by the more recently tense relationship between Blacks and Koreans. In particular, the consequences of the shooting death of Latasha Harlins were catastrophic for interethnic relations. For Black people, as a number of testimonies and writings of Black people after the riots consistently showed, the suspended sentence of Soon Ja Du for the killing of Harlins was inseparable from the acquittals of four White Los Angeles police officers in the Rodney King beating case.<sup>93</sup> Harlins and Rodney King were powerful symbols of racial injustice that treated Blacks as “less than human” and their lives “not worthy of punishment of their aggressors.”<sup>94</sup> In some ways, the shooting death of Harlins

---

<sup>92</sup> “South Central Los Angeles after the Riot,” *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio, May 1, 1992, Retrieved January 11, 2009 from the Nexis TV and Radio Broadcast Transcripts.

<sup>93</sup> For example, see “Community Meeting No. 1,” Foshay Junior High School, September 8, 1992, folder: Community Meeting Transcript #1, box 23/24, Papers of the Webster Commission; Jessica Jones, “Where Do We Go from Here?” *African-American Young Voices: By and For Young, Black Los Angeles*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Summer, 1992), 8, box: Los Angeles Civil Unrest 1992, Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research; and “Koreatown Hit Hard by Los Angeles Riots,” *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio, May 1, 1992, Retrieved January 10, 2009 from the Nexis TV and Radio Broadcast Transcripts.

<sup>94</sup> Assembly Special Committee on the Los Angeles Crisis, *Informational Hearing with the Los Angeles Community* (Sacramento, California: Assembly Publications Office, 1992), 44 and 46.

seemed to lead Blacks to experience a much deeper sorrow and frustration than the beating of Rodney King did, considering that Harlins was just a fifteen-year-old girl without any criminal records but Rodney King was an adult male on parole. Indeed, during the riots, Black youth as well as Black gang members were likely to be stirred up not by the name of the Black adult but by the name of the Black girl. Said Davis, “Whenever I spoke to people on the streets, as often as not Latasha Harlins’s name had come up even before Rodney King, particularly among youths. They would say they weren’t surprised about what happened to a grown black man—but to blow a little sister away like that...Her name became the lightning rod that helped direct anger against the Korean community.”<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> Mike Davis, “L.A. Intifada: Interviews with Mike Davis,” *Social Text*, No. 33 (1992), 20. See also idem, *L.A. Was Just the Beginning - Urban Revolt in the United States: A Thousand Points of Light* (Westfield, New Jersey: Open Magazine Pamphlet Series, 1992), 5. Brenda E. Stevenson also argued that the symbol of injustice during the riots was not Rodney King but Latasha Harlins. See Brenda E. Stevenson, “Latasha Harlins, Soon Ja Du, and Joyce Karlin: A Case Study of Multicultural Female Violence and Justice on the Urban Frontier,” *The Journal of African American History*, Vol. 89, No. 2 (Spring, 2004), 152.

Figure 6: A Graffiti Screenshot Captured from Dai Sil Kim-Gipson's 2004 Documentary Film  
*Wet Sand: Voices from L.A. Ten Years Later*  
(Courtesy of Dai Sil Kim-Gipson)



Although the death of Harlins acted as “the lightning rod” for Black anger, the Korean American melodrama portrayed it as being completely manufactured by the mainstream media and the police to pit minority groups against each other. Korean Americans framed Whites as having a guilty conscience over racial injustice, and seeking to protect affluent White neighborhoods from the furious rioters. According to this melodramatic counternarrative, the resentment against Korean merchants played no role in the burning and looting of Korean-owned stores. Rather, the melodrama imagined that Korean Americans suffered disproportionately because the media and the police maliciously redirected Black people’s anger against a White system of power toward far less powerful Korean Americans. Even though the name of Latasha Harlins had profound resonance among Black youths, Black sorrow and frustration over her murder was framed by the melodrama as the result of media fabrication and manipulation.<sup>96</sup>

In this way, the *p’oktong* melodrama did not acknowledge the possibility that one of the primary causes of their tremendous suffering was the Black-Korean conflict in general and the murder of Harlins in particular. The melodrama delegitimized the charge that Korean Americans bore any responsibility for the April mayhem by taking “a page out of middleman theory (the larger context of black-white conflict),” by positioning Korean Americans as being caught in the middle, and then by erasing the stories of their friction with the Black community.<sup>97</sup> In doing so,

---

<sup>96</sup> Kyung Won Lee, “Legacy of *Sa-ee-gu*: Goodbye *Hahn*, Good Morning, Community Conscience,” *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (1999), 47-48. In fact, most Korean American scholars have uncritically accepted the notion that the media encouraged Blacks to target Korean-owned stores by repeatedly airing the video. See Pyong Gap Min, *Caught in the Middle: Korean Communities in New York and Los Angeles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 107; In-Jin Yoon, *On My Own: Korean Businesses and Race Relations in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 250; Elaine H. Kim, “Home Is Where the *Han* Is: A Korean American Perspective on the Los Angeles Upheavals, in Robert Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 221 and 234; Edward T. Chang and Angela E. Oh, “Korean American Dilemma: Violence, Vengeance, Vision,” in Dean A. Harris, ed., *Multiculturalism from the Margins: Non-Dominant Voices on Difference and Diversity* (Westport, Conn.: Bergin & Garvey, 1995), 135.

<sup>97</sup> Ronald Weitzer, “Racial Prejudice among Korean Merchants in African American Neighborhoods,” *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (1997), 593. See also Jane Twomey, “Communicating about One Another: Racial Ideology in Black and Korean Press Coverage of the 1992 Los Angeles Riot,” in Molefi Kete Asante and

the melodramatic counternarrative delegitimized the burning and looting of Korean-owned stores as an attack neither caused by Black discontents nor mediated by their agency, but rather, misdirected by the media and the police. This lacuna in the Korean American melodrama apparently pushed Denise Harlins, aunt of Latasha Harlins, into the scathing insistence in her testimony before the United States Commission on Civil Rights that, “We understand that quite properly that the Korean community is in denial about Latasha. For that reason, I would suggest that the April 29th event was simply what they would call a crash with the situation prompted by the four LA police officers and the Rodney King case in the black community. And for that reason, they find themselves then victimized by that outside element.”<sup>98</sup> Denise Harlins understood that Korean Americans had continued to maintain their victimization by external forces.

A similar lacuna exists in Korean American narratives of Latino participation in the riots. According to the Webster Commission report, Latinos accounted for 51% of those arrested from April 29 to May 4, 1992.<sup>99</sup> While Latinos in more traditional and stable East Los Angeles communities were largely unaffected by the Los Angeles riots of 1992, recently-immigrated Latinos from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico then living in Pico Union and Koreatown extensively participated in the riots. As Manuel Pastor, Jr. wrote, “when rioting and arson opened

---

Eungjun Min, eds., *Socio-Cultural Conflict between African American and Korean American* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2000), 97.

<sup>98</sup> United States Commission on Civil Rights, *Racial and Ethnic Tensions in American Communities: Poverty, Inequality, and Discrimination---Los Angeles Hearing*, Executive Summary and Transcript of Hearing Held in Los Angeles, California, June 15-17, 1993 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 1998), 165.

<sup>99</sup> William H. Webster and Hubert Williams, “Appendix 8-12,” in *The City in Crisis: A Report by the Special Advisor to the Board of Police Commissioners on the Civil Disorder in Los Angeles*, (Los Angeles: Office of the Special Advisor to the Board of Police Commissioners, October 21, 1992).

up the doors of neighborhood stores, some [Latinos] rushed in.”<sup>100</sup> Some Latinos probably opportunistically participated in the riots. But as indicated by the term “bread riot,” their large-scale participation was also driven by a demand for a right to subsistence. Moreover, as Melvin L. Oliver, James H. Johnson, Jr., and Walter C. Farrell, Jr. pointed out, Latino riot participation reflected at least three dimensions of conflicts between Koreans and Latinos: merchant-customer conflict, residential conflict, and workplace conflict.<sup>101</sup>

The Korean-Latino conflict was also found in the genealogy of the term *chino*. Korean Americans were often called *chino* by Latinos. While the name *chino* was known as a generic term to refer to any Asian, according to Julia María Schiavone Camacho, Mexicans used the term to refer to Chinese as those who stole “capital and women that rightfully belonged to Mexican men” and thus “infringed on the domain of the Mexican poor and working classes.”<sup>102</sup> As the term was gradually expanded to incorporate all Asians, its derogatory meanings could be simultaneously diffused with its expansion. Therefore, when Latinos called Korean Americans *chino*, it would not necessarily have been because they were unaware of distinctions among

---

<sup>100</sup> Manuel Pastor, Jr., *Latinos and the Los Angeles Uprising: The Economic Context* (Claremont, California: Tomás Rivera Center, 1993), 3.

<sup>101</sup> Melvin L. Oliver, James H. Johnson, Jr., and Walter C. Farrell, Jr., “Anatomy of a Rebellion: A Political-Economic Analysis,” in Robert Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 131. For the conflicts between Koreans and Latinos, see also Armando Navarro, “The South Central Los Angeles Eruption: A Latino Perspective,” in Edward T. Chang and Russell C. Leong, eds., *Los Angeles: Struggles toward Multiethnic Community* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 79; Mike Davis, “Who Killed Los Angeles? Part Two: The Verdict Is Given,” *New Left Review*, No. 199 (1993), 38-39; Dong Ok Lee, “Commodification of Ethnicity: The Sociospatial Reproduction of Immigrant Entrepreneurs,” *Urban Affairs Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (1992), 272; Namju Cho, “Check Out, Not In: Koreana Wilshire/Hyatt Take-over and the Los Angeles Korean Community,” *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (1992), 131-139; Norma Stoltz Chinchilla and Nora Hamilton, “Doing Business: Central American Enterprises in Los Angeles,” in Marta López-Garza and David R. Diaz, eds., *Asian and Latino Immigrants in a Restructuring Economy: The Metamorphosis of Southern California* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 203.

<sup>102</sup> Julia María Schiavone Camacho, “Crossing Boundaries, Claiming a Homeland: The Mexican Chinese Transpacific Journey to Becoming Mexican, 1930s-1960s,” *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 78, No. 4 (2009), 552. See also Evelyn Hu-DeHart, “Multiculturalism in Latin American Studies,” *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (2009), 241.

Asian peoples.

In Pico Union and Koreatown, some reports suggested that Latinos engaged in various ethnic jokes about Korean Americans. A common saying was that “If they (Koreans) can, they’ll exploit their own mother.”<sup>103</sup> In making such jokes, Latinos imagined an upside-down world where conspicuous success was delegitimized as exploitative.<sup>104</sup> Despite the manifestations of Latino-Korean tension, the Korean American melodrama was not willing to acknowledge racial and ethnic anxieties between Koreans and Latinos. Many Korean Americans simply did not take into account that Latinos had their own grievances. Instead, Korean Americans reproduced Edward C. Banfield’s thesis by dismissing Latino participation in the riots as mere looters driven by opportunistic desire for commodities rather than possessing any kind of political motivation.

### The making of rebellious Korean Oedipuses

By counterframing the riots into Black and White and simultaneously downplaying the tensions between Blacks and Koreans as well as between Koreans and Latinos, the melodrama constituted Korean Americans as something like the Greek tragic figure of Oedipus: an innocent and “surrogate victim” against whom the victim’s community directed “unappeased” collective violence to save itself from an imminent crisis. For René Girard, the Oedipal scapegoat was chosen not because he had done anything wrong but because he was “vulnerable,” “close at hand,” and because he bore signs of difference such as physical handicap and

---

<sup>103</sup> Miliann Kang, Juliana J. Kim, Edward J. W. Park, and Hae Won Park, *Bridge toward Unity* (Los Angeles: Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates of Southern California, 1993), 21; *Los Angeles Times*, May 18, 1992.

<sup>104</sup> On the politics of ethnic jokes, see Christie Davies, “Ethnic Jokes, Moral Values and Social Boundaries,” *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (1982).



“foreignness.”<sup>105</sup> In the same way, the *p’oktong* melodrama portrayed Korean Americans as an innocent scapegoat, fundamentally irrelevant to the primary dynamics governing American race relations, but victimized nevertheless because: 1) Korean Americans were in the wrong place at the wrong time; 2) Blacks misdirected their anger and resentment against the White system; 3) Latinos participated opportunistically in the riots to loot commodities; and most importantly; 4) the White system, especially the media and the police, used Korean Americans as a scapegoat to appease their guilty conscience over racial injustice and to avert violence against Whites.

In the aftermath of the Los Angeles riots of 1992, a class division emerged in the Korean American community. This division became conspicuous when nasty disputes occurred over how to distribute the substantial amount of relief funds donated by Koreans and Korean Americans. The Los Angeles Korean community is the largest overseas Korean grouping, and the Los Angeles riots of 1992 received headline coverage in South Korea for many days. A large number of Koreans on the peninsula sympathized with their co-ethnics in Los Angeles, and their concern led to contributions totaling \$4.5 million through a South Korean donation campaign. Korean Americans in Los Angeles and elsewhere raised \$5.5 million through various fundraising campaigns. This large sum of money was supposed to be distributed to Korean business owners as well as Korean and non-Korean workers employed in Korean-owned stores. While some of these workers were able to get \$500 from the Koreatown Emergency Relief Fund Distribution Committee, the Koreatown Emergency Task Force, a group dominated by Korean American business leaders and in charge of more money than the Distribution Committee, sought to deny relief funding to these workers. Although forty-five workers were able to secure their share of the

---

<sup>105</sup> René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992 [1977]), 2; idem, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 24-26. See also Laurence Coupe, *Myth* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 153.

relief fund (\$109,000 in total) after waging several campaigns with the Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates (now simply KIWA), a community-based workers' center, as then KIWA Director Roy Hong pointed out, the incident demonstrated a deeply entrenched prejudice against workers in the Korean community.<sup>106</sup>

While the Los Angeles Korean community witnessed the public emergence of previously submerged class divisions over the distribution of relief funds, the melodramatic imagination enhanced Korean ethnic solidarity by telling nationalist stories about overcoming collective adversity. It contextualized the Korean American experience of the riots within nationalist struggles against foreign invasions that have occurred frequently throughout Korean history. In some sense, as Elaine H. Kim has argued, when they found themselves completely abandoned during the riots, Korean national consciousness was the final resort for those who felt what Koreans term *han*, a deep feeling of unassuaged sorrow and unresolved resentment that has

---

<sup>106</sup> Hoon Lee, "Displaced and Demanding Justice," *Third Force*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (1994), 10-14; In-Jin Yoon, *On My Own: Korean Businesses and Race Relations in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 170-173; Eui-Young Yu, "Community-based Disaster Management: The Case of Los Angeles Koreatown during the April 29 Riots," in Ho-Youn Kwon, ed., *Korean Americans: Conflict and Harmony* (Chicago: Center for Korean Studies, North Park College and Theological Seminary, 1994), 148-153; Angie Y. Chung, *Legacies of Struggle: Conflict and Cooperation in Korean American Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 103-104. According to Janice Fine, a workers' center is defined as a "community-based and community-led" organization that engages "in a combination of service, advocacy, and organizing to provide support to low-wage workers." KIWA was established as a workers' center in 1992 by Korean American activists representing a pro-labor and progressive voice within Los Angeles Koreatown. In 1992, KIWA launched a campaign against the Koreana Hotel in Koreatown with other organizations including the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE) Local 11 when the hotel fired 175 unionized workers, most of whom were Latinos. In 1996, KIWA began industry-wide organizing by initiating the "Restaurant Workers' Justice Campaign" which succeeded in significantly reducing labor law violations frequently committed in the Koreatown restaurant industry. Through the "Market Workers' Living Wage Campaign," KIWA developed a creative strategy that tied wages to land use for redevelopment and eventually succeeded in taking the first step to introduce living wages to Koreatown supermarkets in 2007. As a community-based workers' center committed to organizing low-income workers, mostly Latino and Korean immigrants, KIWA also succeeded in a five-year (2002-2007) campaign against wage theft and racial discrimination at Assi Market, one of the largest Korean-owned supermarkets in Koreatown, Los Angeles. See Janice Fine, "Worker Centers: Organizing Communities at the Edge of the Dream," Economic Policy Institute Briefing Paper #159, December 13, 2005, Retrieved December 20, 2010 from <http://www.epi.org/publication/bp159/>; Angie Y. Chung, op. cit., 153-164; Jared Sanchez, Mirabai Auer, Veronica Terriquez, and Mi Young Kim, with KIWA, *Koreatown: A Contested Community at a Crossroad* (Los Angeles: Program for Environmental and Regional Equity, University of Southern California, 2012), 16-17.

accumulated generation after generation from experiences of unjust domination.<sup>107</sup>

Left with no recourse, Korean Americans defended themselves against the rioters by forming several vigilante groups such as the *Chongnyondan* (youth corps), the *Haebyong Tongjihoe* (Korean Marine Corps Veterans Association), and the 4.29 Self Defense Force. Korean radio and TV stations, especially Radio Korea, functioned as a lifeline for those without proper police protection by broadcasting desperate requests for help and directing volunteer rescue teams to riot-hit areas.<sup>108</sup> These Korean vigilante groups were even compared to *ũibyŏng* (the righteous army), a spontaneous group of patriotic militia mainly composed of peasants who, in place of disbanded or destroyed regular armies, sought to save their country from foreign invasions.<sup>109</sup> Radio Korea influenced Korean American identity by airing a nationalist and somewhat fictive historical story of an old mountain fortress named *Hangju san sung*, according to which Korean women used their aprons (*Hangju*) to carry stones that would be hurled against the Japanese invading army in the late sixteenth century.<sup>110</sup> The nationalist ethos was also collectively expressed when Korean Americans organized a May 2, 1992 peace march through Koreatown in which an estimated 30,000 people, mostly Korean Americans, participated. Korean cultural politics were infused in the practices of the march, further instilling within Korean

---

<sup>107</sup> Elaine H. Kim, "Home Is Where the *Han* Is: A Korean American Perspective on the Los Angeles Upheavals, in Robert Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 229.

<sup>108</sup> Eui-Young Yu, "Community-based Disaster Management: The Case of Los Angeles Koreatown during the April 29 Riots," in Ho-Youn Kwon, ed., *Korean Americans: Conflict and Harmony* (Chicago: Center for Korean Studies, North Park College and Theological Seminary, 1994), 138-145. For the role of Radio Korea as a command center, see also Jang Hee Lee, "L.A. P'oktong-sok-ũi Hanin Sanghwangsil [The Korean Situation Room during the Los Angeles Riots]," *Wŏlganjosŏn [Monthly Chosun]*, June, 1992, 150-160.

<sup>109</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, May 9, 1992.

<sup>110</sup> Min-Jung Kim, "Moments of Danger in the (Dis)continuous Relation of Korean Nationalism and Korean American Nationalism," *positions: east asia cultures critique*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1997), 377-378.

Americans a strong sense of Korean national solidarity. Many marchers paraded along riot-scorched streets, carrying the Korean national flags in their hands and singing the Korean national anthem. They were also accompanied by *p'ungmul*, a traditional Korean folk music performance that includes dynamic drumming and acrobatic dancing, and is regarded as a visual and sonic expression of “Korean-ness.”<sup>111</sup>

In addition to fomenting Korean nationalist fervor, the *p'oktong* melodrama also paradoxically sought to reinforce Korean ethnic solidarity by Americanizing the riots through comparisons with the Jewish experience of the Holocaust and the Japanese American experience of internment during World War II. Korean American suffering thus signaled that not only were they innocent scapegoats but also that they would eventually survive adversity just as Jews and Japanese Americans had. Korean American suffering was understood to pave the way to their ultimate triumph, even as they groaning in anguish. For this reason, Kyung Won Lee claimed that the riots were “a blessing in disguise” for the Korean diaspora in the United States. Wrote Lee, “Our own made-in-USA Warsaw spells a blessing in disguise. Jews have wandered the world as pariahs for nearly 3,000 years, but Jewish Americans have achieved the normal life they yearned.

---

<sup>111</sup> *Hankook Ilbo*, May 4, 1992; Timothy R. Tangherliini, “Remapping Koreatown: Folklore, Narrative and the Los Angeles Riots,” *Western Folklore*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (1999), 156-157. For the Korean folk music performance as an expression of Korean-ness, see Nathan Hesselink, “Rhythm and Folk Drumming (*P'ungmul*) as the Musical Embodiment of Communal Consciousness in South Korean Village Society,” in Michael Tenzer and John Roeder, eds., *Analytical and Cross-Cultural Studies in World Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 266. Meanwhile, according to ethnomusicologist Katherine In-Young Lee, *p'ungmul*, although it had been a folk percussion genre performed by rural peasants in pre-industrial Korean society, was appropriated by student activists as “a sonic marker of dissent” during Korea’s anti-dictatorship democratization movement in the 1980s. By performing the farmers’ musical expression of communal life, these activists who often had “a romanticized view of folk culture” found a political vehicle through which they were able to represent *minjung*, the oppressed masses, as the new protagonists of history. See Katherine In-Young Lee, “The Drumming of Dissent during South Korea’s Democratization Movement,” *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (2012), 188-192. For this reason, the *p'ungmul* performance during the peace march might be intended to invoke solidarity with other colored people in the United States. The demonstrators also espoused solidarity with other subjugated people by carrying placards reading “Justice for Rodney King,” “Justice for All People of Color,” and “More Jobs for the Inner-City.” However, as Timothy R. Tangherliini mentioned, such a political message of *p'ungmul* across racial and national boundaries was largely inaccessible to a non-Korean audience. See Tangherliini, op. cit., 156.

Theirs is a beautiful conclusion to a long journey—an epic with a great ending.”<sup>112</sup> The Korean American *p’oktong* melodrama thus sought to enhance the Korean ethnic solidarity even as class was emerging as an important difference in the community.

More significantly, the melodrama also gave birth to Girard’s, “rebellious Oedipus,” a new political subject who, like Job in the Bible, defiantly confronted his accusers and defended himself against the allegation that he was the author of his own downfall. While Oedipus was a “successful scapegoat” because he blinded himself and admitted that he was cursed, Job was a “failed scapegoat” because he stubbornly refused to succumb to the judgment of the crowd against him.<sup>113</sup> The Korean American melodrama constituted Korean Americans as rebellious Korean Oedipuses by highlighting the quality of innocence and actively refuting the charge that they were responsible for their own misfortunes. Even though the rebellious Korean Oedipuses were scapegoated like Oedipus the king, like Job the rebellious sufferer, Korean Americans challenged the unacceptable accusation against them with vigorous counternarratives.

In her collection of essays marking the tenth anniversary of the riots, Korean American lawyer turned advocate Angela Oh referred to “a new political community” born on April 29, 1992.<sup>114</sup> As a newly birthed political community, rebellious Korean Oedipuses linked being scapegoated during the riots to their inability to compel law enforcement agencies to protect Korean Americans from the rioters. Jerry Yu, then executive director of the Korean American

---

<sup>112</sup> Kyung Won Lee, “Legacy of *Sa-ee-gu*: Goodbye *Hahn*, Good Morning, Community Conscience,” *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (1999), 64. See also Edward T. Chang and Angela E. Oh, “Korean American Dilemma: Violence, Vengeance, Vision,” in Dean A. Harris, ed., *Multiculturalism from the Margins: Non-Dominant Voices on Difference and Diversity* (Westport, Conn.: Bergin & Garvey, 1995), 129.

<sup>113</sup> For Girard’s discussion of Job as “rebellious Oedipus,” see Rebecca Adams and René Girard, “Violence, Difference, Sacrifice: A Conversation with René Girard,” *Religion and Literature*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (1993), 32; René Girard, *Job: The Victim of His People* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 35-36.

<sup>114</sup> Angela E. Oh, *Open: One Woman’s Journey* (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press, 2002), 14.

Coalition stated that, “[D]uring this crisis, an overwhelming number of Korean Americans did see directly, firsthand, that our community does lack political strength, and for those reasons we were unable to get the kind of response that we as a community should get, whether it was from the police, who had no presence during three and a half days of rioting and destruction and so on, or from the National Guard.”<sup>115</sup> Yu’s sentiment was shared by many Korean Americans, and in this way, the riots promoted a deep collective yearning among Korean Americans for political power. After *Sa-I-Gu*, Korean American leaders, regardless of their generational or political orientations, reached an almost unanimous consensus that political empowerment had to be a primary goal for Korean Americans.<sup>116</sup>

---

<sup>115</sup> “Up from the Ashes: The Rebuilding Effort,” *Which Way, LA?* KCRW (National Public Radio Station of Santa Monica Junior College), June 2, 1992, folder 2, box 1, Which Way, LA? Collection.

<sup>116</sup> The birth of the rebellious Korean Oedipuses was not a seamless one-way process. As Edward J. W. Park astutely analyzed, birth was simultaneously accompanied by the death of previously important political figures, including mostly first generation immigrant leaders that lacked ties to mainstream American politics. See Edward J. W. Park, “Our L.A.? Korean Americans in Los Angeles after the Civil Unrest,” in Michael J. Dear, H. Eric Schockman, and Greg Hise, eds., *Rethinking Los Angeles* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1996), 158; idem, “Competing Visions: Political Formation of Korean Americans in Los Angeles, 1992-1997,” *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (1998), 46-47; idem, “The Impact of Mainstream Political Mobilization on Asian American Communities: The Case of Korean Americans in Los Angeles, 1992-1998,” in Gordon H. Chang, ed., *Asian Americans and Politics: Perspectives, Experiences, Prospects* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 291-292.

## Epilogue

In April 2012, Korean Americans held several large public events ranging from a multiracial boxing contest for racial harmony to a walk-a-thon, to a documentary screening, to academic conferences in Los Angeles and New York City commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Los Angeles riots. Korean American newspapers, television, and radio stations covered the anniversary extensively, evoking the sorrow and frustration of the riot victims. Pointing with envy at the Los Angeles Museum of Tolerance and its institutionalization of memories stemming from the Holocaust of Jews during World War II, some Korean Americans pointed to the need to archive the community's collective riot experiences for future research. Reflecting on the riots, some argued that Korean Americans still needed to learn how to live in America's multiracial society. Others continued to insist that Korean Americans became major targets of arson and looting either because the media intentionally sensationalized the Black-Korean conflict or because the police maliciously abandoned Koreatown to defend more affluent neighborhoods.

Korean Americans appear to share the common assumption that they lacked the political power to protect themselves. I have no objection to a continuing emphasis on political empowerment, but this pursuit of power raises some important questions. Although it is beyond the scope of this study, in listening to the voices of Korean American community elites eagerly pursuing political power, I cannot help but wonder whose interests will actually be advanced by political representation of this community. Among other differences, class divisions are real in the Korean American community, and there is no guarantee that the interests of low-income immigrant families will be incorporated by an elite-driven quest for political power.

In emphasizing the need for political empowerment, Korean Americans in the post-*Sa-I-Gu* era implicitly constitute Korean Americans as having been apolitical spectators prior to the

riots. The self-portrait as an apolitical people stimulates my historical curiosity. Were they really apolitical bystanders to American racial politics? What possibilities exist that read against the grain of this vision of an apolitical Korean American community? This study is the result of my search for answers, and suggests that the answers are complex and multi-varied.

Throughout this dissertation, I have emphasized that Korean Americans were active agents in the contested terrain of American race relations. In the first chapter of this dissertation, I showed that their agency was embedded within a process by which they became small business owners. Largely drawn from a well-educated urban middle class population in South Korean society, Korean immigrants discovered that they were just a racially disadvantaged minority in American society. They found opportunities to overcome these disadvantages in inner-city Black neighborhoods that had been abandoned by both public and private sectors. Running a small business was like a lifeboat where the disadvantaged Korean immigrants executed strategies and tactics for survival. Both agency and structure operated here, since Korean immigrants as a disadvantaged racial minority could not have found opportunities to act upon as agents had there not been a systematic public and private disinvestment in the inner-city.

Systemic and social forces pushed Korean immigrant merchants into difficult, stress-inducing, and sometimes hostile relations with poor urban Blacks who were up against a system of race- and class-based exploitation. By examining discursive fields in which they made sense of Black hostility, this study attempts to show how Korean Americans identified with, negotiated, and challenged various subject positions within the terrain of U.S. race relations to protect their interests and rights. In responding to claims that their disrespectful treatment of Black customers was responsible for Black-Korean conflict, Korean Americans mobilized counterclaims that sought to deracialize the conflicts. Through languages of cultural differences and communication barriers, they not only tried to transfigure Black-Korean conflict into something manageable,



they also sought commonalities between Blacks and Koreans as a means to bridge differences. Through languages of “media bashing,” Koreans insisted that a media in the service of privileged Whites was responsible for sensationalizing relatively “trivial” issues that occurred between Blacks and Koreans. Through languages of entrepreneurship, Korean Americans attempted to transform interethnic conflicts into everyday disputes that occurred between merchants and customers of any race, nation, or ethnicity. Not only did Korean immigrants challenge their subject position as a “disrespectful ghetto merchant” by employing these various languages, they also delegitimized Black discontent with the presence of Korean immigrant merchants by identifying Korean Americans as a group of hardworking and highly motivated merchants through languages of the model minority myth.

I do not believe these discursive practices are politically progressive. Rather, they tend to reinforce a dominant racial ideology that relies on “color-blind racism,” enabling Whites to deny the reality of racism in determining the distribution of opportunities and social resources in the United States. By subscribing to color-blind racial ideology, Korean Americans actively framed the Black-Korean conflicts in terms of non-racial factors covering important aspects of culture, communication, media sensationalism, and merchant-customer relations. By accepting the dominant ideology as their own through the oppressive languages of the model minority myth, Korean Americans uncritically demanded that Blacks had no basis to criticize hardworking merchants, and that they should blame themselves for their poverty. Furthermore, as indicated by Korean responses to the Latasha Harlins-Soon Ja Du case, many Korean Americans did not hesitate to express old-fashioned or Jim Crow racial prejudice rooted in moral and biological stereotypes of Blacks.

These discursive practices of Korean Americans, expressed within the confines of White-dominated racial ideology, exemplify the struggles of a racial minority over their meaning

and their representation. As the last chapter has demonstrated, their discursive practices enabled Korean Americans to construct a counternarrative of the Los Angeles riots of 1992 that challenged post-riot discourses of Black-Korean conflict that framed Korean immigrant merchants as responsible for the riots. The Korean melodramatic imagination counterframed the riots into an eruption of the ongoing Black-White tension, not only removing Black-Korean conflict from their 1992 riot stories but also constituting themselves as a new political subject who defiantly confronted their accusers and eagerly pursued political power to defend themselves. Within this counternarrative, Korean Americans deployed a rich melodramatic imagination where good people eventually win after suffering extreme pain through no fault of their own.

#### Suggestions for future research

This study focuses mainly on how Korean immigrants made sense of and responded to the Black-Korean tension in Los Angeles. Although it provides brief sketches of Black-Latino and Latino-Korean relations in Los Angeles, further research is needed to clarify how these multiracial relations were aggravated and exploded in the context of the Los Angeles riots of 1992. There has been scant research on relations between Koreans and Latinos. As the largest ethnic group in Koreatown, Latinos participated in large numbers in the riots by looting and burning Korean-owned stores and have been predominantly characterized as opportunistic looters. In this dissertation, I examined Latinos' use of the term *chino* and ethnic jokes to express discontent with Korean immigrant merchants. Much more oral history research, combined with an examination of the Spanish-language newspaper *La Opinión* and the Korean-language newspaper *Hankook Ilbo*, will allow historians to access the voices and experiences of Latinos

and Koreans.

A comparative historical approach will be required to understand more comprehensively the Black-Korean tension in Los Angeles. While much has been made of the Black-Korean conflicts in Los Angeles and New York City respectively, little has been said about similarities and differences in the ways that Korean immigrants shaped narratives about conflicts in each city. The comparative historical approach will also enable historians to understand continuity and change in American urban riots since the 1960s. Further attention needs to be paid to explaining why the Los Angeles riots of 1992, unlike a series of urban riots that swept through American cities in the late 1960s, were relatively confined to Los Angeles and its neighboring cities. As noted in the last chapter, historian Michael B. Katz provides valuable insights into the issue in “Why Don’t American Cities Burn Very Often?” Most of all, according to Katz, the post-1960s period has witnessed a systematic depoliticization of Blacks. The likelihood of Black collective action was significantly reduced through the development of five crucial mechanisms for managing marginalization: “selective incorporation; ostensible, or mimetic, reform; indirect rule; consumption; and repression and surveillance.”<sup>1</sup> Katz’s valuable analysis could be further sharpened by more centrally integrating an analysis of American racial ideology. As David Palumbo-Liu wrote has written, minorities were inculcated with the U.S. racial ideology of “political quietude”: “to stop complaining about oppression and to start drawing upon inner strengths.”<sup>2</sup> At the heart of the racial ideology is the model minority myth that Asian Americans’

---

<sup>1</sup> Michael B. Katz, “Why Aren’t U.S. Cities Burning?” *Dissent*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (2007), 24; idem, “Why Don’t American Cities Burn Very Often?” *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (2008), 192. See also his recently published book. Michael B. Katz, *Why Don’t American Cities Burn?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 186.

economic success “flows from individual self-reliance and community self-sufficiency, not civil rights activism or government welfare benefits.”<sup>3</sup> Further assessment of the extent to and success with which mainstream institutions have deployed model minority discourse will thus be useful in understanding how Blacks have been depoliticized since the late 1960s and why the Los Angeles riots of 1992 didn’t sweep through urban America.

---

<sup>3</sup> Frank H. Wu, *Yellow: Race in America beyond Black and White* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 44.

## **Bibliography**

### **Archives**

- 20th Century Organizational Files, Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research, Los Angeles
- Christopher Commission Papers, Regional History Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Southern California, Los Angeles
- Collection of the Los Angeles Riots of 1992, Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research, Los Angeles
- Los Angeles City Records Center and Archives, Los Angeles
- Los Angeles County Records Center and Archives, Los Angeles
- Rebuild LA Collection, Department of Archives and Special Collections, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles
- Tom Bradley Administrative Papers, Department of Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles
- Webster Commission Papers, Regional History Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Southern California, Los Angeles
- Which Way, LA? Collection, Department of Archives and Special Collections, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles

### **Online Archives**

- Korean Studies Information Service System
- K. W. (Kyung Won) Lee Papers, Department of Special Collections, University of California, Davis, Online Archive of California
- Nexis TV and Radio Broadcast Transcripts
- UCLA Oral History Program, *Black Leadership in Los Angeles Oral History Transcript: Thomas Kilgore, Jr.*, Interviewed by Robin D. G. Kelley, 1988, Department of Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles, Online Archive of California

### **Newspapers**

- Hankook Ilbo*
- Korea Times*
- Koreatown*
- Los Angeles Sentinel*
- Los Angeles Times*

### **Musical Recording**

- Ice Cube, *Death Certificate* [CD], Los Angeles, Priority Records, 1991

## **Government Documents**

Assembly Special Committee on the Los Angeles Crisis, *Informational Hearing with the Los Angeles Community* (Sacramento, California: Assembly Publications Office, 1992).

Assembly Special Committee on the Los Angeles Crisis, *To Rebuild Is Not Enough: Final Report and Recommendations of the Assembly Committee on the Los Angeles Crisis* (Sacramento, California: Assembly Publications Office, 1992).

Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, *Violence in the City: An End or a Beginning?* (Los Angeles: California Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, 1965).

Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations, *The New Asian Peril: Report of a Hearing on Rising Anti-Asian Bigotry* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations, 1984).

Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations, *Today's Conflicts, Tomorrow's Challenges: A Report on Five State of the County Hearings* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations, 1984).

Los Angeles County Office of Alcohol Programs, *1986-87 Los Angeles County Plan for Alcohol-Related Services* (Los Angeles: Department of Health Services, 1986).

Senate Committee on Governmental Organization, *Transcript of Proceedings: Interim Hearing on Over-Concentration of Liquor Licenses in Los Angeles County*, Carson Community Center, City of Carson, Los Angeles County, October 13, 1983 (Sacramento, California: Senate Committee on Governmental Organization, 1983).

Senate Office of Research, *Options for Action: Presented to Senate Special Task Force on a New Los Angeles* (Sacramento, California: Senate Office of Research, 1992).

Senate Office of Research, *The South-Central Los Angeles and Koreatown Riots: A Study of Civil Unrest* (Sacramento, California: Senate Office of Research, 1992).

Senate Special Task Force on a New Los Angeles, *New Initiatives for a New Los Angeles: Final Report and Recommendations* (Sacramento, California: Senate Publications, 1992)

United States Commission on Civil Rights, *Racial and Ethnic Tensions in American Communities: Poverty, Inequality, and Discrimination---Los Angeles Hearing*, Executive Summary and Transcript of Hearing Held in Los Angeles, California, June 15-17, 1993 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 1998).

United States Commission on Civil Rights, *The Economic Status of Americans of Asian Descent: An Exploratory Investigation* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1988).

United States Congress, Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, *The State of Urban America: Hearing before the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs*, 103rd Congress, 1st Session (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1993).

United States Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1991* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1992).

United States Presidential Task Force on Los Angeles Recovery, *Action Plan* (Washington, D.C.: The Task Force, 1992).

### **Secondary Works**

Abelmann, Nancy and John Lie, *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).

Adams, Rebecca and René Girard, "Violence, Difference, Sacrifice: A Conversation with René Girard," *Religion and Literature*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (1993).

Ahn, Hyeon-Hyo and Yun-Sun Chung, "The Financial Development of Korean Americans: A Comparison of Korean and Chinese American Banks in California," *Journal of Korean Association of Regional Geographers*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2006).

Ahn, Hyeon-Hyo and Jang-Pyo Hong, "The Evolution of Korean Ethnic Banks in California," *Journal of Korean Association of Regional Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1999).

Allen, James P. and Eugene Turner, *The Ethnic Quilt: Population Diversity in Southern California* (Northridge, Calif.: The Center for Geographical Studies, California State University, Northridge, 1997).

Althusser, Louis, *For Marx* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970).

Amsden, Alice H., *Asia's Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

Andersen, Kurt, "New Ellis Island," *Time* (June 13, 1983).

Anderson, Susan, "A City Called Heaven: Black Enchantment and Despair in Los Angeles," in Allen J. Scott and Edward W. Soja, eds., *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

Anker, Libby, "The Melodramatic Imagination and American Political Life," Conference Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Political Science Association, Las Vegas, Nevada, March 8, 2007, Retrieved April 21, 2009 from Academic Search Premier database.

- Anonymous, "Oesang Sonnimün P'ihara: Ch'arari Uyrül Sasö Chunün P'yöni Natda [Don't Deal with Credit Demanding Customers: It Would Be Better to Buy Milk and Give It to Them]," Ppuri [*The Korean Roots*], No. 15 (1983).
- Asante, Molefi Kete, "African Americans and Korean Americans: Modeling the American Dream," in Molefi Kete Asante and Eungjun Min, eds., *Socio-Cultural Conflict between African American and Korean American* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2000).
- Ashman, Linda, Jaime de la Vega, Marc Dohan, Andy Fisher, Rosa Hippler, and Billi Romain, *Seeds of Change: Strategies for Food Security for the Inner City* (Los Angeles: Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Planning, UCLA, 1993).
- Association for Korean Studies, Migukanüi Hanin K'ömyunit'i: Hyönhwangkwa Mirae [*Korean Communities in America: Present Conditions and Future*] (Los Angeles: Korean Pioneer Press, 1978).
- Aviles, Gilberto, "The Banking Services Outreach Project, Check Cashing, & Money Orders: A Commentary about Poor People's Access to Financial Services," M.A. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1991.
- Bailey, Benjamin, "Communicative Behavior and Conflict between African-American Customers and Korean Immigrant Retailers in Los Angeles," *Discourse & Society*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2000).
- Baker, Keith Michael, *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
- Bakewell, Danny, "The Brotherhood Crusade: A Conceptual Model," *The Black Scholar*, Vol. 7, No. 6 (March, 1976).
- Balibar, Étienne, "Structural Causality, Overdetermination, and Antagonism," in Antonio Callari and David F. Ruccio, eds., *Postmodern Materialism and the Future of Marxist Theory: Essays in the Althusserian Tradition* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1996).
- Balibar, Étienne, "Is There a 'Neo-Racism'?" in Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, eds., *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991).
- Ban, Hyun and R. C. Adams, "L.A. Times Coverage of Korean Americans before, after 1992 Riots," *Newspaper Research Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 3-4 (Summer/Fall, 1997).
- Banfield, Edward C., *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and the Future of Our Urban Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970 [1968]).



- Barthes, Roland, "The Discourse of History," in E. S. Shaffer, ed., *Comparative Criticism: A Yearbook*, Vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
- Basi, Raghbir S., "Role of the 'Free Enterprise' Ideology in Less-Developed Countries," *Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (1967).
- Bass, Karen, "Appendix E: The Campaign to Rebuild South Central Los Angeles without Liquor Stores," in Prakash L. Grover, ed., *Preventing Problems Related to Alcohol Availability: Environmental Approaches – Reference Guide* (Rockville, Maryland: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, 1999).
- Bates, Timothy, "An Analysis of Korean-Immigrant-Owned Small-Business Start-Ups with Comparisons to African-American- and Nonminority-Owned Firms," *Urban Affairs Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Dec., 1994).
- Bean, Jonathan J., "'Burn, Baby, Burn': Small Business in the Urban Riots of the 1960s," *The Independent Review*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Fall, 2000).
- bell hooks, "Let Freedom Ring," in Haki R. Madhubuti, ed., *Why L.A. Happened: Implications of the '92 Los Angeles Rebellion* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1993).
- Blalock, Hubert M., Jr., *Toward a Theory of Minority-Group Relations* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1967).
- Bluestone, Barry and Bennett Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1982).
- Bonacich, Edna, "Thoughts on Urban Unrest," in Fred L. Pincus and Howard J. Ehrlich, eds., *Race and Ethnic Conflict: Contending Views on Prejudice, Discrimination, and Ethnviolence* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).
- Bonacich, Edna, "The Other Side of Ethnic Entrepreneurship: A Dialogue with Waldinger, Aldrich, Ward and Associates," *International Migration Review*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Autumn, 1993).
- Bonacich, Edna, "The Role of the Petite Bourgeoisie within Capitalism: A Response to Pyong Gap Min," *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1989).
- Bonacich, Edna, "The Social Costs of Immigrant Entrepreneurship," *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1988).
- Bonacich, Edna, "'Making It' in America: A Social Evaluation of the Ethics of Immigrant Entrepreneurship," *Sociological Perspectives*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Oct., 1987).

- Bonacich, Edna and Tae Hwan Jung, "A Portrait of Korean Small Business in Los Angeles: 1977," in Eui-Young Yu, Earl H. Philips, and Eun Sik Yang, eds., *Koreans in Los Angeles: Prospects and Promises* (Los Angeles: Koryo Research Institute, 1982).
- Bonacich, Edna, Ivan Light, and Charles Choy Wong, "Small Business among Koreans in Los Angeles," Retrieved November 13, 2008 from ERIC database.
- Brooks, Peter, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
- Buhle, Paul and Mike Alewitz, *Insurgent Images: The Agitprop Murals of Mike Alewitz* (New York: Monthly Review, 2002).
- Bush, George, "Remarks to Community Leaders in Los Angeles," *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, May 11, 1992.
- Bush, George, "Address to the Nation on the Civil Disturbances in Los Angeles, California," *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, May 4, 1992.
- Byun, Juna, "The Politicoeconomic Conspiracy of the 1992 Los Angeles Civil Unrest and Hwabyung, the Scapegoat Syndrome of Korean American Victims," Chaeoe Hanin Yŏn'gu [*Studies of Koreans Abroad*], No. 5 (1995).
- Camacho, Julia Maria Schiavone, "Crossing Boundaries, Claiming a Homeland: The Mexican Chinese Transpacific Journey to Becoming Mexican, 1930s-1960s," *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 78, No. 4. (2009).
- Cannon, Lou, *Official Negligence: How Rodney King and the Riots Changed Los Angeles and the LAPD* (New York: Times Books, 1997).
- Caplovitz, David, *The Poor Pay More: Consumer Practices of Low-Income Families* (New York: Free Press, 1963).
- Chae, Augustina Jhi-ho, "To Be Almost like White: The Case of Soon Ja Du," M.A. thesis, University of Nebraska, Omaha, 2002.
- Chai, Jae Hyung, "The Korean-American Community and U.S. Politics," in Tae-Hwan Kwak and Seong Hyong Lee, eds., *The Korean-American Community: Present and Future* (Seoul: Kyungnam University Press, 1991).
- Chan, Sucheng, "Asian American Struggles for Civil, Political, Economic, and Social Rights," in Jean Yu-wen Shen Wu and Thomas C. Chen, eds., *Asian American Studies Now: A Critical Reader* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010).
- Chan, Sucheng, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Twayne, 1991).

- Chang, Edward T., "Korean Swapmeets in Los Angeles: Economic and Racial Implications," *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2004).
- Chang, Edward T., "New Urban Crisis: Korean-African American Relations," in Kwang Chung Kim, ed., *Koreans in the Hood: Conflict with African Americans* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).
- Chang, Edward T. and Jeannette Diaz-Veizades, *Ethnic Peace in the American City: Building Community in Los Angeles and Beyond* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).
- Chang, Edward T., "African American Boycotts of Korean-Owned Stores in New York and Los Angeles," in Paul R. Brass, ed., *Riots and Pogroms* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).
- Chang, Edward T. and Angela E. Oh, "Korean American Dilemma: Violence, Vengeance, Vision," in Dean A. Harris, ed., *Multiculturalism from the Margins: Non-Dominant Voices on Difference and Diversity* (Westport, Conn.: Bergin & Garvey, 1995).
- Chang, Edward T., "Los Angeles 'Riots' and the Korean-American Community," in Ho-Youn Kwon, ed., *Korean Americans: Conflict and Harmony* (Chicago: Center for Korean Studies, North Park College and Theological Seminary, 1994).
- Chang, Edward T., "Building Minority Coalitions: A Case Study of Korean and African Americans," *Korea Journal of Population and Development*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (July, 1992).
- Chang, Edward T., "New Urban Crisis: Intra-Third World Conflict," in Shirley Hune, Hyungchan Kim, Stephen S. Fugita, and Amy Ling, eds., *Asian Americans: Comparative and Global Perspectives* (Pullman, Washington: Washington State University Press, 1991).
- Chang, Edward T., "New Urban Crisis: Korean-Black Conflicts in Los Angeles," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1990.
- Chang, Edward T., "Korean-Black Conflict in Los Angeles: Perceptions and Realities," *Korean Observer*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (1989).
- Chang, Jeff, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: Picador, 2005).
- Chang, Jeff, "Race, Class, Conflict and Empowerment: On Ice Cube's 'Black Korea,'" in Edward T. Chang and Russell C. Leong, eds., *Los Angeles: Struggles toward Multiethnic Community* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994).
- Charles, Camille Zubrinsky, "Residential Segregation in Los Angeles," in Lawrence D. Bobo, et al eds., *Prismatic Metropolis: Inequality in Los Angeles* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2000).

- Chen, Gavin M. and John A. Cole, "The Myths, Facts, and Theories of Ethnic, Small-Scale Enterprise Financing," *Review of Black Political Economy*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Spring, 1988).
- Chin, Hyung Ki, "The Survey of Business and Management of Korean Firms in Southern California," in Byung Wook Yoon, ed., *The Survey of Socio-Economic Status of Korean Residents in Southern California* (Los Angeles: Korean Chamber of Commerce of Southern California, 1977).
- Chinchilla, Norma Stoltz and Nora Hamilton, "Doing Business: Central American Enterprises in Los Angeles," in Marta López-Garza and David R. Diaz, eds., *Asian and Latino Immigrants in a Restructuring Economy: The Metamorphosis of Southern California* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).
- Cho, Namju, "Check Out, Not In: Koreana Wilshire/Hyatt Take-over and the Los Angeles Korean Community," *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (1992).
- Cho, Sumi K., "Korean Americans vs. African Americans: Conflict and Construction," in Robert Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
- Cho, Young-chol, "The *Chaebol* Regime and the Developmental Coalition of Domination," in Byeong-cheon Lee, ed., *Developmental Dictatorship and the Park Chung-Hee Era: The Shaping of Modernity in the Republic of Korea* (Paramus, New Jersey: Homa & Sekey, 2006).
- Choi, Sung Hak, "'Trouble City': Korean-Black Conflict in Inner City Los Angeles: 1994-2003," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2003.
- Chung, Angie Y., *Legacies of Struggle: Conflict and Cooperation in Korean American Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).
- Cohen, Lizabeth, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage, 2004).
- Cohen, Lizabeth, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
- Coupe, Laurence, *Myth* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé and Garry Peller, "Reel Time/Real Justice," in Robert Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
- Cross, Brian, *It's Not about a Salary...Rap, Race and Resistance in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1993).

- Curran, Ron, "Malign Neglect: The Roots of an Urban War Zone," *L.A. Weekly*, December 30, 1988-January 5, 1989.
- Davies, Christie, "Ethnic Jokes, Moral Values and Social Boundaries," *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (1982).
- Davis, Mike, *Dead Cities and Other Tales* (New York: The New Press, 2002).
- Davis, Mike, *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the US City* (London: Verso, 2000).
- Davis, Mike, "Who Killed Los Angeles? Part Two: The Verdict Is Given," *New Left Review*, No. 199 (1993).
- Davis, Mike, "Who Killed LA? A Political Autopsy," *New Left Review*, No. 197 (1993).
- Davis, Mike, "LA: The Fire This Time," *Covert Action Information Bulletin*, No. 41 (1992).
- Davis, Mike, "Los Angeles: The Fire This Time: Interview with Journalist Mike Davis," *Socialist Worker* (May, 1992).
- Davis, Mike, *L.A. Was Just the Beginning - Urban Revolt in the United States: A Thousand Points of Light* (Westfield, New Jersey: Open Magazine Pamphlet Series, 1992).
- Davis, Mike, "L.A. Intifada: Interviews with Mike Davis," *Social Text*, No. 33 (1992).
- Davis, Mike, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Vintage, 1992).
- Dorrington, Claudia, "Salvadoran Immigrants and Refugees: Demographic and Socioeconomic Profiles," in Marta López-Garza and David R. Diaz, eds., *Asian and Latino Immigrants in a Restructuring Economy: The Metamorphosis of Southern California* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).
- Durán, Lisa, Bill Gallegos, Eric Mann, Glenn Omatsu, eds., *Derechos Humanos para los Inmigrantes/Immigrant Rights and Wrongs* (Los Angeles: Labor/Community Strategy Center, 1994), 30; Min Hyoung Song, *Strange Future: Pessimism and the 1992 Los Angeles Riots* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).
- Eddy, Mark, "Minority and Women-Owned Business Programs of the Federal Government," in S. N. Colamery, ed., *Affirmative Action: Catalyst or Albatross?* (Commack, New York: Nova Science, 1998).
- Eley, Geoff, "Is All the World a Text? From Social History to the History of Society Two Decades Later," in Terrence J. McDonald, ed., *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996).
- Emirbayer, Mustafa and Ann Mische, "What Is Agency?" *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol.

103, No. 4 (Jan., 1998).

Fine, Janice, "Worker Centers: Organizing Communities at the Edge of the Dream," Economic Policy Institute Briefing Paper #159, December 13, 2005, Retrieved December 20, 2010 from <http://www.epi.org/publication/bp159/>.

Finney, Ron, Greg Jackson, and Sheridan Sonne, *Redlining Revealed: Where to Bank to Save Your Neighborhood* (Los Angeles: The Center for New Corporate Priorities, 1977).

Fogelson, Robert M., *Violence as Protest: A Study of Riots and Ghettos* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1971).

Fogelson, Robert M., "White on Black: A Critique of the McCone Commission Report on the Los Angeles Riots," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 82, No. 3 (1967).

Fogelson, Robert M., *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993 [1967]).

Fones-Wolf, Elizabeth A., *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-60* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

Freer, Regina, "From Conflict to Convergence: Interracial Relations in the Liquor Store Controversy in South Central Los Angeles," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1999.

Freer, Regina, "Black-Korean Conflict," in Mark Baldassare, ed., *The Los Angeles Riots: Lessons for the Urban Future* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).

Fruto, Richard, "Revisiting the Scene of Crime," *KoreAm Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (April, 2007).

Gale, Dennis E., *Understanding Urban Unrest: From Reverend King to Rodney King* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 1996).

George, Lynell, *No Crystal Stair: African-Americans in the City of Los Angeles* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994).

Gerould, Daniel C., "The Americanization of Melodrama," in Daniel C. Gerould, ed., *American Melodrama* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1983).

Girard, René, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (New York: Continuum, 2003 [1987]).

Girard, René, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992 [1977]).

Girard, René, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

- Girard, René, *Job: The Victim of His People* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).
- Glaude, Eddie S., Jr., "Introduction: Black Power Revisited," in Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., ed., *Is It Nation Time? Contemporary Essays on Black Power and Black Nationalism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).
- Goldberg, David Theo, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1993).
- Gossman, Lionel, "History and Literature: Reproduction or Signification," in Robert H. Canary and Henry Kozicki, eds., *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978).
- Gotanda, Neil, "Re-Producing the Model Minority Stereotype: Judge Joyce Karlin's Sentencing Colloquy in *People v. Soon Ja Du*," in Wendy L. Ng, eds., *Reviewing Asian America: Locating Diversity* (Pullman, Washington: Washington State University Press, 1995).
- Gregory, Derek, "Interventions in the Historical Geography of Modernity: Social Theory, Spatiality and the Politics of Representation," *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, Vol. 73, No. 1 (1991).
- Grimsted, David, "Melodrama as Echo of the Historically Voiceless," in Tamara K. Hareven, ed., *Anonymous Americans: Explorations in Nineteenth-Century Social History* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971).
- Hahn, Harlan, "Los Angeles and the Future: Uprisings, Identity, and New Institutions," in Michael J. Dear, H. Eric Schockman, and Greg Hise, eds., *Rethinking Los Angeles* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1996).
- Hahn, Harlan, "The Civil Uprising and Intra-Urban Governance," in George O. Totten III and H. Eric Schockman, eds., *Community in Crisis: The Korean American Community after the Los Angeles Civil Unrest of April 1992* (Los Angeles: Center for Multiethnic and Transnational Studies, University of Southern California, 1994).
- Hamilton, Cynthia, *Apartheid in an American City: The Case of the Black Community in Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Labor/Community Strategy Center, 1987).
- Han, June Sang, "Hügin P'oktongüi Kūningwa Wōnin [Immediate and Remote Causes of the Black Riot]," *Segyewa Na [The World and Me]*, No. 32 (1992).
- Hardt, Michael, "The Rainbow War," *Left Curve*, No. 17 (1993).
- Harper, Michael C., "The Consumer's Emerging Right to Boycott: *NAACP v. Claiborne Hardware* and Its Implications for American Labor Law," *The Yale Law Journal*, Vol. 93, No. 3 (1984).

- Harrison, Bennett and Barry Bluestone, *The Great U-Turn: Corporate Restructuring and the Polarizing of America* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).
- Hata, Donald Teruo, Jr. and Nadine Ishitani Hata, "Asian-Pacific Angelinos: Model Minorities and Indispensable Scapegoats," in Norman M. Klein and Martin J. Schiesl, eds., *20th Century Los Angeles: Power, Promotion, and Social Conflict* (Claremont, Calif.: Regina Books, 1990).
- Henderson, Timothy J., *Beyond Borders: A History of Mexican Migration to the United States* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).
- Henthorn, Cynthia Lee, *From Submarines to Suburbs: Selling a Better America, 1939-1959* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2006).
- Herd, Denise, "Ambiguity in Black Drinking Norms: An Ethnohistorical Interpretation," in Linda A. Bennett and Genevieve M. Ames, eds., *The American Experience with Alcohol: Contrasting Cultural Perspectives* (New York: Plenum, 1985).
- Hesselink, Nathan, "Rhythm and Folk Drumming (*P'ungmul*) as the Musical Embodiment of Communal Consciousness in South Korean Village Society," in Michael Tenzer and John Roeder, eds., *Analytical and Cross-Cultural Studies in World Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- Hing, Bill Ong, *Making and Remaking Asian America through Immigration Policy, 1850-1990* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).
- Horne, Gerald, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997).
- Horowitz, Donald L., *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
- Hu-DeHart, Evelyn, "Multiculturalism in Latin American Studies," *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (2009).
- Hunt, Darnell M., *Screening the Los Angeles "Riots": Race, Seeing, and Resistance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- Hurh, Won Moo, *Comparative Study of Korean Immigrants in the United States: A Typological Approach* (San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1977).
- Hurh, Won Moo, *Assimilation of the Korean Minority in the United States* (Elkins Park, PA: Philip Jaisohn Memorial Foundation, 1977).
- Hutchinson, Earl Ofari, "Fighting the Wrong Enemy," *The Nation*, November 4, 1991.



- Ice Cube and Angela Y. Davis, "Nappy Happy," *Transition*, No. 58 (1992).
- Ikemoto, Lisa C., "Traces of the Master Narrative in the Story of African American/Korean American Conflict: How We Constructed 'Los Angeles,'" *Southern California Law Review*, Vol. 66 (May, 1993).
- Jacobs, Meg, "State of the Field: The Politics of Consumption," *Reviews in American History*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (2011).
- Jacobs, Meg, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
- Jakobson, Roman, *Language in Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987).
- Jenkins, Keith, *Re-thinking History* (New York: Routledge, 1991).
- Jo, Moon H. and Daniel D. Mast, "Changing Images of Asian Americans," *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1993).
- Jo, Moon H., "Korean Merchants in the Black Community: Prejudice among the Victims of Prejudice," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (July, 1992).
- Johnson, James H., Jr., Cloyzelle K. Jones, Walter C. Farrell, Jr., and Melvin L. Oliver, "The Los Angeles Rebellion: A Retrospective View," *Economic Development Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (Nov., 1992).
- Johnson, James H., Jr. and Melvin L. Oliver, "Interethnic Minority Conflict in Urban America: The Effects of Economic and Social Dislocations," *Urban Geography*, Vol. 10, No. 5 (1989).
- Jones, Gareth Stedman, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- Joyce, Patrick, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
- Joyce, Patrick D., *No Fire Next Time: Black-Korean Conflicts and the Future of America's Cities* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).
- Jun, Helen H., "Black Orientalism: Nineteenth-Century Narratives of Race and U.S. Citizenship," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 58, No. 4 (2006).
- Kang, Miliann, Juliana J. Kim, Edward J. W. Park, and Hae Won Park, *Bridge toward Unity* (Los Angeles: Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates of Southern California, 1993).

- Katz, Michael B., "Why Don't American Cities Burn Very Often?" *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (2008).
- Katz, Michael B., "Why Aren't U.S. Cities Burning?" *Dissent*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (2007).
- Kelley, Robin D. G., *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional! Fighting the Cultural Wars in Urban America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997).
- Kelley, Robin D. G., *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1996).
- Kidokkyo Sasang, "LA Hŭgin P'oktongi Namkin Kyohundŭl [Lessons from the Black Riot in Los Angeles]," *Kidokkyo Sasang [Christian Thought]*, No. 402 (1992).
- Kijakazi, Kilolo, *African-American Economic Development and Small Business Ownership* (New York: Garland, 1997).
- Kim, Bong Hwan, "As American As Possible," in Elaine H. Kim and Eui-Young Yu, eds., *East to America: Korean American Life Stories* (New York: The New Press, 1996).
- Kim, Chan-Hie, "Sŏngsŏrŭl Tonghae Pon Sa-I-Gu Sat'aewa Miju An-ŭi Hanindŭl [The Sa-I-Gu Riots and Korean Americans from a Biblical Perspective]," in Sung Do Kang, ed., *P'oktonginya Hangjaenginya [Riots or Uprising]* (Seoul: Korean Caucus, Cal-Pac Annual Conference of UMC, 1994).
- Kim, Claire Jean, *Bitter Fruit: The Politics of Black-Korean Conflict in New York City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).
- Kim, Dae Young and L. Janelle Dance, "Korean-Black Relations: Contemporary Challenges, Scholarly Explanations, and Future Prospects," in Hazel M. McFerson, ed., *Blacks and Asians: Crossings, Conflict and Commonality* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2006).
- Kim, David S. and Charles Choy Wong, "Business Development in Koreatown, Los Angeles," in Hyung-chan Kim, ed., *The Korean Diaspora: Historical and Sociological Studies of Korean Immigration and Assimilation in North America* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-Clio, 1977).
- Kim, Elaine H., "Between Black and White: An Interview with Bong Hwan Kim," in Karin Aguilar-San Juan, ed., *The State of Asian America: Activism and Resistance in the 1990s* (Boston: South End Press, 1994).
- Kim, Elaine H., "Home Is Where the Han Is: A Korean American Perspective on the Los Angeles Upheavals," in Robert Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

- Kim, Hak-Hoon, "Residential Patterns and Mobility of Koreans in Los Angeles County," M.A. thesis, California State University, Los Angeles, 1986.
- Kim, Hyun Sook and Pyong Gap Min, "The Post-1965 Korean Immigrants: Their Characteristics and Settlement Patterns," *Korea Journal of Population and Development*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Dec., 1992).
- Kim, Hyung-A, *Korea's Development under Park Chung Hee: Rapid Industrialization, 1961-79* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004).
- Kim, Illsoo, "Korea and East Asia: Premigration Factors and U.S. Immigration Policy," in James T. Fawcett and Benjamin V. Carino, eds., *Pacific Bridges: The New Immigration from Asia and the Pacific Islands* (Staten Islands, New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1987).
- Kim, Illsoo, *New Urban Immigrants: The Korean Community in New York* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).
- Kim, Jodi, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).
- Kim, John S. C. and Sung J. Hwang, "The Korean American Bar Association and the Riot," in George O. Totten III and H. Eric Schockman, eds., *Community in Crisis: The Korean American Community after the Los Angeles Civil Unrest of April 1992* (Los Angeles: Center for Multiethnic and Transnational Studies, University of Southern California, 1994).
- Kim, Kichung, "Can We All Get Along?" in Wendy L. Ng, eds., *Reviewing Asian America: Locating Diversity* (Pullman, Washington: Washington State University Press, 1995).
- Kim, Kwang Chung and Shin Kim, "Ethnic Roles of Korean Immigrant Churches in the United States," in Ho-Youn Kwon, Kwang Chung Kim, and R. Stephen Warner, eds., *Korean Americans and Their Religions: Pilgrims and Missionaries from a Different Shore* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001).
- Kim, Kwang Chung and Shin Kim, "The Multiracial Nature of Los Angeles Unrest in 1992," in Kwang Chung Kim, ed., *Koreans in the Hood: Conflict with African Americans* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).
- Kim, Minjeong, "Silencing the Voice of the Minority: Revisiting the Media Coverage of the 1992 Civil Disturbance in Los Angeles," *Asian Communication Research*, No. 3 (2007).
- Kim, Min-Jung, "Moments of Danger in the (Dis)continuous Relation of Korean Nationalism and Korean American Nationalism," *positions: east asia cultures critique*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1997).

- Kim, Nadia, "The Migration of White Racism to South Korea," Conference Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Boston, MA, August 1-4, 2008, Retrieved April 6, 2009 from SocINDEX with Full Text.
- Kim, Nadia, "'Seoul-America' on America's 'Soul': South Koreans and Korean Immigrants Navigate Global White Racial Ideology," *Critical Sociology*, Vol. 32, No. 2-3 (2006).
- Kim, Nadia, "A View from Below: An Analysis of Korean Americans' Racial Attitudes," *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2004).
- Kim, Shin, "Conceptualization of Inter-Minority Group Conflict: Conflict between Korean Entrepreneurs and Black Local Residents," in Tae-Hwan Kwak and Seong Hyong Lee, eds., *The Korean-American Community: Present and Future* (Seoul: Kyungnam University Press, 1991).
- Koch, Nadine and H. Eric Schockman, "Riot, Rebellion or Civil Unrest? The Korean American and African American Business Communities in Los Angeles," in George O. Totten III and H. Eric Schockman, eds., *Community in Crisis: The Korean American Community after the Los Angeles Civil Unrest of April 1992* (Los Angeles: Center for Multiethnic and Transnational Studies, University of Southern California, 1994).
- Koo, Hagen, "Small Entrepreneurship in a Developing Society: Patterns of Labor Absorption and Social Mobility," *Social Forces*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (1976).
- Korean American Inter-Agency Council, *KAIAC Press Packet: Korean American Inter-Agency Council Announces Results of a Comprehensive Survey Assessing Situation of Korean American Victims Ten Months after the 1992 LA Riots*, March 8, 1993.
- Kwon, Kathy Sung-Ah, "The Case of Latasha Harlins and Soon Ja Du: A Critical Intervention in the Mediated Politics of Racialized Representations," M.A. thesis, California State University, Northridge, 1997.
- Labor/Community Strategy Center, *Reconstructing Los Angeles from the Bottom Up* (Los Angeles: Labor/Community Strategy Center, 1993).
- Laux, Hans Dieter and Günter Thieme, "Koreans in Greater Los Angeles: Socioeconomic Polarization, Ethnic Attachment, and Residential Patterns," in Wei Li, ed., *From Urban Enclave to Ethnic Suburb: New Asian Communities in Pacific Rim Countries* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006).
- Lee, Dong Ok, "Commodification of Ethnicity: The Sociospatial Reproduction of Immigrant Entrepreneurs," *Urban Affairs Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (1992).
- Lee, Hoon, "Displaced and Demanding Justice," *Third Force*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (1994).
- Lee, Jae-Bong, "Cultural Representation of Anti-Americanism: The Negative Images of the

- United States in South Korean Literature and Arts, 1945-1994,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Hawaii, 1994.
- Lee, Jang Hee, “L.A. P’oktong-sok-üi Hanin Sanghwangsil [The Korean Situation Room during the Los Angeles Riots],” *Wölganjosön [Monthly Chosun]*, June, 1992.
- Lee, Jennifer, *Civility in the City: Blacks, Jews, and Koreans in Urban America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).
- Lee, Katherine In-Young, “The Drumming of Dissent during South Korea’s Democratization Movement,” *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (2012).
- Lee, Kyung, “Settlement Patterns of Los Angeles Koreans,” M.A. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1969.
- Lee, Kyung Won and Ji Hyun Kim, “4.29 L.A. P’oktongüi Chinsilül Ch’ajasö [Searching for the Truth about Sa-I-Gu L.A. Riots],” *Wölganjosön [Monthly Chosun]*, October, 2005.
- Lee, Kyung Won, “Sa-I-Gu: A Haunting Prelude to the Fire Next Time,” *KoreAm Journal* (April, 2002).
- Lee, Kyung Won, “Legacy of *Sa-ee-gu*: Goodbye *Hahn*, Good Morning, Community Conscience,” *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (1999).
- Lee, Kyung Won, “Urban Impressionist,” in Elaine H. Kim and Eui-Young Yu, eds., *East to America: Korean American Life Stories* (New York: The New Press, 1996).
- Lee, Mary, *Drowning in Alcohol: Retail Outlet Density, Economic Decline, and Revitalization in South L.A.* (San Rafael, Calif.: Marin Institute for the Prevention of Alcohol and Other Drug Problems, 1998).
- Lee, Namhee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).
- Lee, Robert G., “Fu Manchu Lives! Asian Pacific Americans as Permanent Aliens in American Culture,” in Paul M. Ong, ed., *The State of Asian Pacific America: Transforming Race Relations* (Los Angeles: LEAP Asian Pacific American Public Policy Institute and UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 2000).
- Lee, Robert G., *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999).
- Lee, Sae, “Barahm,” in Edward T. Chang and Russell C. Leong, eds., *Los Angeles: Struggles toward Multiethnic Community* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994).
- Lee, Sun Joo, ed., *Sa-I-Gu P’oktong Paeksö: L.A. Soyo Sat’aeüi Chosa Mit Chinsil Kyumyöng*

[*White Paper of Sa-I-Gu Riots: Research and Investigation into the Los Angeles Riots of 1992*] (Los Angeles: Sa-I-Gu Association, 2002).

Lie, John and Nancy Abelmann, "The 1992 Los Angeles Riots and the 'Black-Korean Conflict,'" in Kwang Chung Kim, ed., *Koreans in the Hood: Conflict with African Americans* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

Lie, John, *Han Unbound: The Political Economy of South Korea* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

Light, Ivan and Elizabeth Roach, "Self-Employment: Mobility Ladder or Economic Lifeboat?" in Roger Waldinger and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, eds., *Ethnic Los Angeles* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996).

Light, Ivan, Hadas Har-Chvi, and Kenneth Kan, "Black/Korean Conflict in Los Angeles," in Seamus Dunn, ed., *Managing Divided Cities* (London: Keele University Press, 1994).

Light, Ivan and Edna Bonacich, *Immigrant Entrepreneurs: Koreans in Los Angeles 1965-1982* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

Light, Ivan, Im Jung Kwuon, and Deng Zhong, "Korean Rotating Credit Associations in Los Angeles," *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1990).

Lim, In-Sook, "Korean Immigrant Women's Challenge to Gender Inequality at Home: The Interplay of Economic Resources, Gender, and Family," *Gender and Society*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1997).

Logan, John R. and Harvey L. Molotch, *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

Lopez, David E., Eric Popkin, and Edward Telles, "Central Americans: At the Bottom, Struggling to Get Ahead," in Roger Waldinger and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, eds., *Ethnic Los Angeles* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996).

Lowe, Lisa, *Immigrant Acts: Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

Lui, Mary Ting Yi, *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery Murder, Miscegenation, and Other Dangerous Encounters in Turn-of-the-Century New York City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Marable, Manning and Joseph Wilson, "Black Leadership and Organized Labor: From Workplace to Community," in Manning Marable, Immanuel Ness, and Joseph Wilson, eds., *Race and Labor Matters in the New U.S. Economy* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

- Marable, Manning, *Beyond Black and White: Transforming African-American Politics* (London: Verso, 1996).
- Marcy, Sam, *A Marxist Defense of the L.A. Rebellion* (New York: World View Forum, 1992).
- Martin, Ben L., "From Negro to Black to African American: The Power of Names and Naming," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 106, No. 1 (1991).
- McWilliam, Rohan, "Melodrama and the Historians," *Radical History Review*, No. 78 (2000).
- Min, Pyong Gap and Andrew Kolodny, "The Middleman Minority Characteristics of Korean Immigrants in the United States," in Kwang Chung Kim, ed., *Koreans in the Hood: Conflict with African Americans* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).
- Min, Pyong Gap, *Caught in the Middle: Korean Communities in New York and Los Angeles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996).
- Min, Pyong Gap, "Korean Americans," in Pyong Gap Min, ed., *Asian Americans: Contemporary Trends and Issues* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1995).
- Min, Pyong Gap, [Review of the book *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots*], *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 101, No. 2 (Sep., 1995).
- Min, Pyong Gap, "Korean Immigrants in Los Angeles," Paper presented at the Conference on California Immigrants in World Perspective, University of California, Los Angeles, Vol. 5, 1989-1990, Retrieved April 21, 2008 from <http://repositories.cdlib.org/issr/volume5/2>.
- Min, Pyong Gap, "White-Collar Occupations to Small Business: Korean Immigrants' Occupational Adjustment," *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Summer, 1984).
- Modarres, Ali, *The Racial and Ethnic Structure of Los Angeles: A Geographic Guide* (Los Angeles: Edmund G "Pat" Brown Institute of Public Affairs, California State University, Los Angeles, 1994).
- Monroe, Sylvester, "The Gospel of Equity," *Time*, May 10, 1993, 54, Retrieved September 22, 2008 from Academic Search Premier Database.
- Moon, Chung-in and Byung-joon Jun, "Modernization Strategy: Ideas and Influences," in Byung-Kook Kim and Ezra F. Vogel, eds., *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011).
- Moon, Katharine H. S., *Sex among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).
- Morrison, Peter A. and Ira S. Lowry, *A Riot of Color: The Demographic Setting of Civil Disturbance in Los Angeles*, RAND Corporation Paper, P-7819 (1993).

- Mosher, James F. and Rose M. Works, *Confronting Sacramento: State Preemption, Community Control, and Alcohol-Outlet Blight in Two Inner-City Communities* (San Rafael, California: Marin Institute for the Prevention of Alcohol and Other Drug Problems, 1994).
- Mosher, James F. and Joseph R. Mottl, "The Role of Nonalcohol Agencies in Federal Regulation of Drinking Behavior and Consequences," in Mark H. Moore and Dean R. Gerstein, eds., *Alcohol and Public Policy: Beyond the Shadow of Prohibition* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1981).
- Navarro, Armando, "The South Central Los Angeles Eruption: A Latino Perspective," in Edward T. Chang and Russell C. Leong, eds., *Los Angeles: Struggles toward Multiethnic Community* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994).
- Niblack, Preston and Peter J. E. Stan, "Financing Public Services in Los Angeles," in James B. Steinberg, et al eds., *Urban America: Policy Choices for Los Angeles and the Nation* (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand Corporation, 1992).
- Njeri, Itabari, *The Last Plantation: Color, Conflict, and Identity: Reflections of a New World Black* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).
- Nopper, Tamara K., "Beyond the Bootstrap: How Korean Banks and U.S. Government Institutions Contribute to Korean Immigrant Entrepreneurship in the United States," Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, 2008.
- Nopper, Tamara K., "The 1992 Los Angeles Riots and the Asian American Abandonment Narrative as Political Fiction," *New Centennial Review*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2006).
- "Notes: Non-Labor Picketing and the Thornhill Case," *Columbia Law Review*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (1941).
- Nussbaum, Martha Craven, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).
- Oh, Angela E., *Open: One Woman's Journey* (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press, 2002).
- Okazawa-Rey, Margo and Marshall Wong, "Organizing in Communities of Color: Addressing Interethnic Conflicts," *Social Justice*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (1997), Retrieved April 17, 2009 from Expanded Academic ASAP via Gale.
- Okiihiro, Gary Y., "Is Yellow Black or White? Revisited," in Hazel M. McFerson, ed., *Blacks and Asians: Crossings, Conflict and Commonality* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2006).



- Okiihiro, Gary Y., *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994).
- Oliver, Melvin L., James H. Johnson, Jr., and Walter C. Farrell, Jr., "Anatomy of a Rebellion: A Political-Economic Analysis," in Robert Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
- Omatsu, Glenn, "The 'Four Prisons' and the Movements of Liberation: Asian American Activism from the 1960s to the 1990s," in Karin Aguilar-San Juan, ed., *The State of Asian America: Activism and Resistance in the 1990s* (Boston: South End Press, 1994).
- Omi, Michael and Howard Winant, "The Los Angeles 'Race Riot' and Contemporary U.S. Politics," in Robert Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
- Ong, Paul, Kyeyoung Park, and Yasmin Tong, "The Korean-Black Conflict and the State," in Paul Ong, Edna Bonacich, and Lucie Cheng, eds., *The New Asian Immigration in Los Angeles and Global Restructuring* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).
- Ong, Paul and Suzanne Hee, *Losses in the Los Angeles Civil Unrest, April 29-May 1, 1992: Lists of the Damaged Properties* (Los Angeles: UCLA Center for Pacific Rim Studies, 1993)
- Ong, Paul, "Poverty and Employment Issues in the Inner Urban Core," in Allen J. Scott and E. R. Brown, eds., *South-Central Los Angeles: Anatomy of an Urban Crisis*, Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies, UCLA, Working Paper No. 6 (1993).
- Palumbo-Liu, David, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).
- Park, Edward J. W., "The Impact of Mainstream Political Mobilization on Asian American Communities: The Case of Korean Americans in Los Angeles, 1992-1998," in Gordon H. Chang, ed., *Asian Americans and Politics: Perspectives, Experiences, Prospects* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).
- Park, Edward J. W., "Competing Visions: Political Formation of Korean Americans in Los Angeles, 1992-1997," *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (1998).
- Park, Edward J. W., "Our L.A.? Korean Americans in Los Angeles after the Civil Unrest," in Michael J. Dear, H. Eric Schockman, and Greg Hise, eds., *Rethinking Los Angeles* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1996).
- Park, Jong Sang, "LA Kyomin Sahoewa Ch'ongyōngsa [Korean Community in Los Angeles and the Consul General]," in Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trades, ed., Oegyogwanūi Hoego [*Recollections of Korean Diplomats*] (Seoul: Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trades, 2002).

- Park, Kyeyoung, "Confronting the Liquor Industry in Los Angeles," *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, Vol. 24, No. 7/8 (2004).
- Park, Kyeyoung, *The Korean American Dream: Immigrants and Small Business in New York City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).
- Park, Kyeyoung, "The Morality of a Commodity: A Case Study of 'Rebuilding L.A. without Liquor Stores,'" *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (1995/1996).
- Park, Noja, "Han'gukchök Kündae Mandülgi I [The Making of Korean-style Modernity: Part One]," *Inmulkwa Sasang [Persons and Thoughts]*, Vol. 45 (January, 2002).
- Pastor, Manuel, Jr., *Latinos and the Los Angeles Uprising: The Economic Context* (Claremont, California: Tomás Rivera Center, 1993).
- Patterson, Wayne, *The Ilse: First-Generation Korean Immigrants in Hawaii, 1903-1973* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press and Center for Korean Studies, 2000).
- Reed, Adolph, Jr., "Black Particularity Reconsidered," in Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., ed., *Is It Nation Time? Contemporary Essays on Black Power and Black Nationalism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).
- Reed, Adolph, Jr., "False Prophet II: All for One and None for All," *The Nation*, January 28, 1991.
- Regalado, James A., "Creating Multicultural Harmony? A Critical Perspective on Coalition-Building Efforts in Los Angeles," in Eui-Young Yu and Edward T. Chang, eds., *Multiethnic Coalition Building in Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Institute for Asian American and Pacific Asian Studies, California State University, Los Angeles, 1995).
- Regalado, James A., "Community Coalition-Building," in Mark Baldassare, ed., *The Los Angeles Riots: Lessons for the Urban Future* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).
- Regalado, James A., "Political Representation, Economic Development, Policymaking, and Social Crisis in Los Angeles, 1973-1992," in Gerry Riposa and Carolyn G. Dersch, eds., *City of Angels* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, 1992).
- Reimers, David M., *Still the Golden Door: The Third World Comes to America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
- Richardson, Elaine B. and Ronald L. Jackson II, "Preface," in Elaine B. Richardson and Ronald L. Jackson II, eds., *African American Rhetoric(s): Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004).
- Richter, Gerhard, *Walter Benjamin and the Corpus of Autobiography* (Detroit: Wayne State

University Press, 2000).

- Robinson, Dean E., *Black Nationalism in American Politics and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- Rosegrant, Susan, "The Flawed Emergency Response to the 1992 Los Angeles Riots," John F. Kennedy School of Government Case Program (C16-00-1586.0; C16-00-1587.0; C16-00-1588.0), Harvard University, 2000.
- Sabagh, Georges and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, "From 'Give Me Your Poor' to 'Save Our State': New York and Los Angeles as Immigrant Cities and Regions," in David Halle, ed., *New York and Los Angeles: Politics, Society, and Culture: A Comparative View* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- Sabagh, Georges and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, "Population Change: Immigration and Ethnic Transformation," in Roger Waldinger and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, eds., *Ethnic Los Angeles* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996).
- Said, Edward W., *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978).
- Sanchez, Jared, Mirabai Auer, Veronica Terriquez, and Mi Young Kim, with KIWA, *Koreatown: A Contested Community at a Crossroad* (Los Angeles: Program for Environmental and Regional Equity, University of Southern California, 2012).
- Schiesl, Martin, "Behind the Shield: Social Discontent and the Los Angeles Police since 1950," in Martin Schiesl and Mark M. Dodge, eds., *City of Promise: Race and Historical Change in Los Angeles* (Claremont, Calif.: Regina Books, 2006).
- Scott, Allen J., "Industrial Urbanism in Late-Twentieth-Century Southern California," in Michael J. Dear, ed., *From Chicago to L.A.: Making Sense of Urban Theory* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2002).
- Scott, James C., *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).
- Scott, Joan W., "After History?" *Common Knowledge*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1996).
- Sears, David O., "Urban Rioting in Los Angeles: A Comparison of 1965 and 1992," in Mark Baldassare, ed., *The Los Angeles Riots: Lessons for the Urban Future* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).
- Shah, Nayan, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
- Shakur, Sanyika, *Monster: The Autobiography of an L.A. Gang Member* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1993).

- Shim, Doobo, "The Logic of Television News: The Case of the Los Angeles Riots," in Molefi Kete Asante and Eungjun Min, eds., *Socio-Cultural Conflict between African American and Korean American* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2000).
- Shin, Eui Hang and Kyung-Sup Chang, "Peripherization of Immigrant Professionals: Korean Physicians in the United States," *International Migration Review*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Winter, 1988).
- Sides, Josh, "Straight into Compton: American Dreams, Urban Nightmares, and the Metamorphosis of a Black Suburb," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (Sep., 2004).
- Sides, Josh, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
- Smith, Erna, "Transmitting Race: The Los Angeles Riot in Television News," Research Paper R-11, Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 1994.
- Soja, Edward W., "Los Angeles, 1965-1992: From Crisis-Generated Restructuring to Restructuring-Generated Crisis," in Allen J. Scott and Edward W. Soja, eds., *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).
- Soja, Edward W., *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989).
- Sonenshein, Raphael J., "The Battle over Liquor Stores in South Central Los Angeles: The Management of an Interminority Conflict," *Urban Affairs Review*, Vol. 31, No. 6 (1996).
- Song, Kyungjin, "Two Tales of an American City: Portrayal of African American and Korean American Relations in Two Ethnic Newspapers between 1991 and 1993, The *Los Angeles Sentinel* and the *Korea Times*," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 1997.
- Song, Min Hyoung, *Strange Future: Pessimism and the 1992 Los Angeles Riots* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).
- Song, Min Hyoung, "Sa-I-Gu Revisited: Interview with Elaine Kim," *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2004).
- Staff of the Los Angeles Times, *Understanding the Riots: Los Angeles before and after the Rodney King Case* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Times, 1992).
- Stevenson, Brenda E., "Latasha Harlins, Soon Ja Du, and Joyce Karlin: A Case Study of Multicultural Female Violence and Justice on the Urban Frontier," *The Journal of African American History*, Vol. 89, No. 2 (Spring, 2004).

- Stewart, Ella, "Communication between African Americans and Korean Americans: Before and after the Los Angeles Riots," in Edward T. Chang and Russell C. Leong, eds., *Los Angeles: Struggles toward Multiethnic Community* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994).
- Strohm, Susan Mary, "Black Community Organization and the Role of the Black Press in Resource Mobilization in Los Angeles from 1940 to 1980," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1989.
- Sugrue, Thomas J., *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).
- Suh, Kwan-Mo, "Hyöndaeh Han'guk Sahoeüi Kyegüp Kusöng [The Class Structure in Contemporary Korean Society]," in Jin-Kyun Kim, ed., *Han'guk Sahoeüi Kyegüp Yön'gu [A Study of Social Classes in Korean Society]*, Vol. 1 (Seoul: Hanul, 1985).
- Takaki, Ronald, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998 [1989]).
- Tangherliini, Timothy R., "Remapping Koreatown: Folklore, Narrative and the Los Angeles Riots," *Western Folklore*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (1999).
- Taylor, Quintard, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998).
- Tchen, John Kuo Wei, *New York before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture 1776-1882* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).
- Terborg-Penn, Rosalyn, "Naming Ourselves: The Politics and Meaning of Self-designation," in Robert L. Harris, Jr. and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, eds., *The Columbia Guide to African American History Since 1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).
- Thompson, E. P., *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: The New Press, 1993).
- Thornton, Michael C. and Hemant Shah, "US News Magazine Images of Black-Asian American Relationship, 1980-1992," *The Communication Review*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1996).
- Tikhonov, Vladimir, "World is a Battlefield: Social Darwinism as the New World Model of Korean Intelligentsia of the 1900s," *Bochumer Jahrbuch zur Ostasienforschung*, Vol. 27 (2003).
- Tong, Yasmin Theresa, "In the Middle: Mediating Black-Korean Conflict in South Central Los Angeles," M.A. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1992.

- Twomey, Jane, "Communicating about One Another: Racial Ideology in Black and Korean Press Coverage of the 1992 Los Angeles Riot," in Molefi Kete Asante and Eungjun Min, eds., *Socio-Cultural Conflict between African American and Korean American* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2000).
- Tyler, Bruce Michael, "Black Radicalism in Southern California, 1950-1982," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1983.
- UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education and Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, *Who Benefits from Redevelopment in Los Angeles? An Evaluation of Commercial Redevelopment Activities in the 1990s* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, 1999), 36-41, Retrieved July 1, 2011 from <http://www.communitybenefits.org/downloads/WhoBenefits.pdf>.
- Umemoto, Karen, "Blacks and Koreans in Los Angeles: The Case of LaTasha Harlins and Soon Ja Du," in James Jennings, ed., *Blacks, Latinos, and Asians in Urban America: Status and Prospects for Politics and Activism* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1994).
- Ungar, Sanford J., *Fresh Blood: The New American Immigrants* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).
- Useem, Bert, "The State and Collective Disorders: The Los Angeles Riot/Protest of April, 1992," *Social Forces*, Vol. 76, No. 2 (1997).
- Vaca, Nicolás C., *The Presumed Alliance: The Unspoken Conflict between Latinos and Blacks and What It Means for America* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004).
- Valle, Victor M. and Rodolfo D. Torres, *Latino Metropolis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).
- Vargas, João H. Costa, "The *Los Angeles Times*' Coverage of the 1992 Rebellion," *Ethnicities*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2004).
- Vernon, James, "Notes toward an Introduction," in James Vernon, ed., *Re-reading the Constitution: New Narratives in the Political History of England's Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- Vernon, James, "Who's Afraid of the 'Linguistic Turn'? The Politics of Social History and Its Discontents," *Social History*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (January, 1994).
- Vicinus, Martha, "'Helpless' and 'Unfriended': Nineteenth-Century Domestic Melodrama," *New Literary History*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (1981).
- Waldinger, Roger, "From Ellis Island to LAX: Immigrant Prospects in the American City," *International Migration Review*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Winter, 1996).

- Waldinger, Roger and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, "The Making of a Multicultural Metropolis," in Roger Waldinger and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, eds., *Ethnic Los Angeles* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996).
- Wall, Wendy L., *Inventing the "American Way": The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- Watts, Jerry G., "Reflections on the Rodney King Verdict and the Paradoxes of the Black Response," in Robert Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
- Watts, Jerry G., "Racial Discourse in an Age of Social Darwinism," *Democratic Left*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (July-August, 1990).
- Weedon, Chris, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (New York: Blackwell, 1987).
- Webster, William H. and Hubert Williams, *The City in Crisis: A Report by the Special Advisor to the Board of Police Commissioners on the Civil Disorder in Los Angeles*, (Los Angeles: Office of the Special Advisor to the Board of Police Commissioners, October 21, 1992).
- Weitzer, Ronald, "Racial Prejudice among Korean Merchants in African American Neighborhoods," *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (1997).
- West, Cornel, "The Paradox of African American Rebellion," in Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., ed., *Is It Nation Time? Contemporary Essays on Black Power and Black Nationalism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).
- Whitby, Kenny J., *The Color of Representation: Congressional Behavior and Black Interests* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).
- Wild, Mark, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008).
- Williams, Linda, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O. J. Simpson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
- Wu, Frank H., *Yellow: Race in America beyond Black and White* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).
- Yoo, Hyunsuk, "Korean Americans and African Americans in the Los Angeles Riots: A Study of the Rhetoric of Conflict," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1996.
- Yoon, In-Jin, *On My Own: Korean Businesses and Race Relations in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997).
- Yoon, In-Jin, [Review of the book *Caught in the Middle: Korean Merchants in America's Multiethnic Cities*], *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 103, No. 1 (July, 1997).

Yoon, In-Jin, *The Social Origins of Korean Immigration to the United States from 1965 to the Present* (Honolulu: East-West Center, 1993).

Yu, Eui-Young, "Community-based Disaster Management: The Case of Los Angeles Koreatown during the April 29 Riots," in Ho-Youn Kwon, ed., *Korean Americans: Conflict and Harmony* (Chicago: Center for Korean Studies, North Park College and Theological Seminary, 1994).

Yuh, Ji-Yeon, "Imagined Community: Sisterhood and Resistance among Korean Military Brides in America, 1950-1996," in Shirley Hune and Gail M. Nomura, eds., *Asian/Pacific Islander American Women: A Historical Anthology* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

Zia, Helen, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000).