

Legacy of *Sa-ee-gu*: Goodby *Hahn*, Good Morning, Community Conscience

K. W. Lee

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Monday
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Never again

By K.W. Lee
Editor

"It's a miracle. That's been pretty much the headline of Korean people. Whether it's the Seoul Central or the National Assembly will survive." —Soo Lee, 21, in a radio

After three days of looting, burning, killing and anarchy, most of downtown Los Angeles has been in ruins. To hear the looting and

The Seoul Law School history applies here too. It's the same kind of looting and burning that has been going on in Seoul since the end of World War II, a

misery's memory—violence, and destruction. Who has taught one to perpetrate by a publicly permitted, but

intentionally justified anarchy.

To Korean immigrants, it is a shocking reminder that they have suffered the same kind of violence as a result of the war. The looting and anarchy in Seoul, the impoverished, crime-ravaged

city in Los Angeles, shows that what we thought was over.

Police weren't there in the crucial early hours of the riot.

Heather did the National Guard intervention.

Political leaders—including President Bush—were out of touch with the reality. They viewed and acted too late.

The police were not there in the crucial early hours of the riot. The police were not there in the crucial early hours of the riot.

At the height of the riot, the police were not there in the crucial early hours of the riot.

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KOREA TIMES

Weekly English Edition

Out of ashes, solidarity

30,000 KAs march for peace through K-town

By Dennis Park
Korea Times

Under a blazing sun, college students filled the streets of Koreatown on Monday, May 21, for a 30,000-strong march for peace through K-town. The march was part of the 30,000-strong demonstration marking the 20th anniversary of the Korean War.

Meeting at Anderson Park in Koreatown, the demonstrators held a press conference and then marched through K-town.

They carried a banner that read "We demand an end to the Korean War." The banner was carried by a group of students from the University of California, Los Angeles.

They also carried a banner that read "We demand an end to the Korean War." The banner was carried by a group of students from the University of California, Los Angeles.



A mob of 30,000 KAs and supporters march down Vermont Avenue in Koreatown on May 21.

reminis who was shot to death on April 30 during a guerrilla battle in the mountains of Korea. The march was led by a group of students from the University of California, Los Angeles.

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1,867 KA store owners suffer heaviest toll

Damages estimated at \$347 million

By Charles H. Kim
Korea Times

At least 1,867 Korean-owned businesses were reported burned or looted during the worst fires in Los Angeles history, according to Radio Korea.

This amounts to more than half of the approximately 3,100 businesses in Los Angeles destroyed during the four days of vandalism, looting and arson that followed the quake in the Northridge area.

The losses for Korean-owned businesses were estimated at \$347 million, according to the Korea Times. Almost every sector of the Korean American business community in Los Angeles suffered directly or indirectly from the destruction.

The most severely affected include:

- Grocery stores: Grocery stores were the hardest hit among Korean-owned businesses. 273 stores burned or burned and lost more than \$66 million in losses.

• See Times, Page B

Watts Market burns; neighbors try to save store

Owner Chung Lee vows to rebuild in South Central L.A.

By Stanley Nyeung Kim
Korea Times

Chung Lee's name was synonymous with "good neighbor." A man who tirelessly gave back to his community. He is 15-year-old Chung Lee's son.

The model merchant was police. He was a man who tirelessly gave back to his community. He is 15-year-old Chung Lee's son.

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KA fatality during four-day riot

Community mourns for Edward Lee

By Richard Hayes
Korea Times

Koreatown has buried its riot dead—William Edward Lee, 18, who died in a rioting incident during the Los Angeles upsurge.

Lee died in Koreatown on the second night of rioting. According to some accounts, he and one of his three companions were shot in a guerrilla battle involving police and two groups of Koreans who met in the street.

"I can't say how it happened because there are different stories out there," said Edward's brother, James Lee. Like other close to the family, James Lee didn't want to talk about the circumstances of the shooting.

"He was not shot by a police officer," said Capt. John Davis, commanding officer of Whitefish Division, which covers the Watts hill.

A 19-year-old man who shot the dead.

• See Lee, Page B



Funeral service for Edward Lee held in Ardmore Park.

of Koreatown.

Lee's death compounded the anguish of Korean Americans mourning

Bush tours burnt out K-town

By Kay Hwangsoo
Korea Times

President George Bush promised to be "as responsive as I can" to the requests of the Korean American community at a meeting with community leaders in Los Angeles on May 21.

The federal government can do "a lot" to help the community, Bush said in response to concerns expressed by Koreans that they need help in rebuilding their lives.

Small Business Administration Secretary Robert S. Roth said that a Small Business Administration loan can be obtained in as little time as three weeks. The officials said people can get disaster money and SBA loans.

Some Koreans expressed skepticism and discomfort with the offer of help. "We don't want an SBA loan," said Kim Yoo. "We want to be compensated for everything."

President Bush meets with KA leaders at Radio Korea on May 21.



President Bush meets with KA leaders at Radio Korea on May 21.

injustice, said the owner of a burned-out grocery store and beauty salon in South Central Los Angeles.

"It's very difficult to qualify for SBA loans," said David H. Kim, president of the Korean American General Association.

Bush said he would try to cut the number of people who are not

receiving federal help as soon as possible.

"I know some of the requests," the people would normally have to meet to qualify for the loans, he said.

"I know some of the requests," the people would normally have to meet to qualify for the loans, he said.

About 500 people, mostly Korean American, demonstrated outside of Radio Korea's offices, at 2001 W. Olympic Boulevard, yelling slogans such as "We need compensation," "We need our tax" and "We need OASDI."

"I think we are not getting to the problem that we are having," said Edward Chung, an assistant professor at Old Pacific University who met with Bush.

"I think Kim's job isn't to talk to just political people."

Kim of the grocery association, however, said a disaster plan, "It was just this week," he said.

Legacy of *Sa-ee-gu*: Goodbye *Hahn*, Good Morning, Community Conscience

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K. W. Lee

Here again, that season of *Hahn*—the everlasting unquenched woe—is just around the corner, and I come down with the melancholy bug. I can't help it. Born of the Korean womb, I remain a child of this ancient affliction. So do, I suspect, the bulk of my fellow diasporic Koreans.

Come April 29 each passing year, *Sa-ee-gu* mocks our unacceptable *Pal'ja* (fate). Korean Americans call it *Sa-ee-gu* (4-29 in native pronunciation) to commemorate the three days of firebombing, looting and mayhem in which they watched their American Dream go up in smoke.

In my twilight year of seventy-one, I search for some clues as to why. A walk through the ashes of *Sa-ee-gu* is a walk through our own smoldering ember of *Hahn*. Exploring the *Sa-ee-gu* wreckage is exploring our own scarred *Hahnscape*. Our sojourn in America has more to do with our own sojourn in our own collective psyche as prisoners of *Hahn* in this land of freedom.

Sa-ee-gu, if nothing else, was but the latest validation of our *Hahn* embedded in our soul through an unending series of upheavals and oppressions, foreign and domestic, for nearly a millennium, thanks to the cursed geopolitics of the rabbit-shaped peninsula surrounded by covetous powers.

K. W. LEE has worked forty years as reporter, editor and publisher of mainstream dailies and Asian weeklies. He founded and edited *Koreatown Weekly* 1979-82 and *The Korea Times* weekly English Edition 1990-92. He is presently a special projects adviser at KCRA-TV in Sacramento and he freelances/lectures investigative journalism, last fall at University of California, Davis and this fall at University of California, Los Angeles.

✚ Across the other ocean we came west to America. It was our made-in-America Warsaw, where ghetto Jews in the capital of Poland, under brutal Nazi boots, stood all alone against the world. Of all places on earth, we have met our own latter-day pogrom in the City of Angels.

It's as if we have committed an unpardonable crime of being born Korean. We look up to Heaven and implore, "Why us, why Korean Americans?"

Seven springs ago this month, South Central L.A. and the adjoining Koreatown burned and choked, as I lay dying on the edge of my bed, waiting for a liver transplant.

I caught a glimpse of a Korean woman stretching her arms skyward in front of her tiny, scorched hole-in-the-wall store, crying inconsolably, "Why?"

I tried to muffle her sobbing, along with the distant wailings of hundreds of ghosts who had fallen victim to the everyhour robberies and everyday shootings in the violent inner cities of America. I didn't succeed.

"Put off dying for the duration," I heard a voice inside me whisper. I sat up in my sickbed and, with shaky hands, began editing reams of copies from the nine undaunted staffers—mostly fresh from college or still in college and high school—bravely holding out in the battle zone of the L.A.-based English-language newspaper—*The Korea Times* English Edition.

There was much work to do as the editor of the lone English voice for nearly a half million tongue-tied, bedraggled immigrants in the Southland who don't speak the language of their adopted country. Their English-speaking children in schools were still too young to shout back at the L.A. media juggernaut. And my rainbow-hued, youthful staff including those of Filipino, Anglo, Chinese, and mixed-race heritage were a heroic bunch. During the fiery siege, they stayed put in the trenches under the wings of third-generation Korean American news editor Brenda Sunoo and veteran bilingual editor Kapson Lee, a pioneer immigrant newspaperwoman.

The next issue's banner headline read: "Cry Koreatown."

✚ How easily time—and people of *Hahn*—forget. Today, L.A. Koreatown doesn't seem to remember *Sa-ee-gu*, or doesn't want to. Its inhabitants are in denial, having wiped away their embittered American Dream from their collective memory.



Symposium on Korean-Black relations, organized by the Korean Chamber of Commerce in Los Angeles, at the Oriental Mission Church in Los Angeles, November 1991.

Photograph courtesy of *Korea Times* Los Angeles.

To this forty-year practitioner in mainstream dailies, *Sa-ee-gu* shall remain a dirty little secret hidden deep in the bowels of the corporate media beast.

Since the launching of the weekly in 1990, I went through a three-year roller coaster ride in the bloody balkanization of this nation's most diverse megapolis with a hundred different languages. I came to bear witness to America's first media-fanned urban mob assault on a hapless tribe of new immigrants who have no voice nor clout—even after twenty-five years of their arrival on this shore.

In my book it's a textbook case of the L.A. media exploiting the rich mother lode of race and violence for the May ratings sweep season, pitting a politically powerful but economically frustrated minority against a seemingly thriving tribe of strangers.

For America, *Sa-ee-gu* marked the first multiethnic urban upheaval, signaling a radical departure from the nation's historical black-white paradigm, and exposing the widening ethnic, cultural and class chasms—between the inner-city poor and the suburban middle class, immigrants and natives, English-speaking and non-English speaking.

For Asian Americans, the singling out of Korean and other Asian merchants by marauding mobs points to the critical need to redouble pan-Asian efforts to cultivate better understanding and relations with their Latino and African American neighbors who make up the majority of L.A. and other urban centers.

For Korean Americans, *Sa-ee-gu* was a wakeup call to look beyond their insular ethnic enclave and to redefine their destiny in the multicultural and multi-ethnic society for their long-range survival as a cohesive, inclusive people in harmony with other ethnic groups.

While 10,000 Korean immigrants in the Southland fell victim to the three days of firebombing, looting and mayhem, L.A.'s ratings-driven media honchos fiddled on their way to the bank during their successful May ratings sweep. Even before Korean and African Americans had a chance to get to know each other's common struggles and sorrows of their past, both groups watched themselves tearing each other apart as enemies in the shouting TV sound bites and screaming headlines.

Instead of fighting together against their twin Number-One foes called crime and poverty, both minorities were dragged onto the Roman arena at the whims of the media managers in pursuit of ever higher ratings in cynical symbiosis with roaming gangs and so-called street activists as willing unpaid players. Thus, the "Black-Korean race war"—firmly framed in the public image—turned into a media dream, providing the win-win formula of race, crime and violence for the crucial May ratings sweep.

Leaving UCLA Transplant Center with a new liver, I returned to the still smoldering rubble. I caught a glimpse of ethnic cleansing. More than 2,300 Korean-run businesses had been looted, burned or damaged, amounting to about half of the city's \$1 billion total loss; forty-one Koreans had been shot or injured; and eighteen-year-old student volunteer Edward Lee had been slain amid wild crossfire between two groups of barricaded shopkeepers. On the South-Central front, nearly 90 percent of the Korean businesses were victimized. My weekly newspaper, luckily spared by the mob sacking, shrank to skeleton size.

Pulitzer-prize winning journalist/historian Stanley Karnow—a Vietnam battle-seasoned, old

Monday
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Quote of the week

"They could deploy hundreds of thousands to Iraq in a matter of days, and it took close to 36 hours to set up in Los Angeles. We're just talking about 1,000 or 2,000 people, not 100,000. So I don't understand."

L.A. Slauson manager Jay Lee

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Food donations can be delivered to: Oriental Mission Church 424 N. Western Ave.

For more information, call KERC, 213/487-7217, Y.B. Kim

Asia hand—visited with me in the *Sa-ee-gu* aftermath. He spoke wistfully of an irony in our misfortune. Some of the Korean shops reminded him of a faded picture of his Jewish grandparents in their cluttered grocery in Brooklyn, where they had slaved day and night while their sons attended college on scholarships. “My folks came to America from Russia to escape pogrom,” he said. “But your people left their homeland to experience their pogrom here in America.”

In the subsequent years, the local TV and print media honchos staged a series of breast-beating talk shows and seminars, sermonizing against the race-baiting coverage and its dire consequences. But the real victims—the burned out Korean shopkeepers—weren’t even on their consciousness.

In plain English these media elites had no clues as to who had caused the open season on these unwelcome strangers. They have learned little or nothing. Nor do they care. The Koreans—voiceless, fragmented and divisive— don’t matter.

I know this nightmare scenario by heart. Every time the headlines in the only paper in town—the mighty *Los Angeles Times*—and the ensuing “black-Korean conflict” soundbites on TV screens barked, the Korean merchants caught the deadly gunfire and firebombs.

During the year prior to the riot, the *Times*, which had no bilingual-Korean reporter, ran ninety-two articles relating to Korean Americans, sixty-three of them on black-Korean tensions, according to a Korean American Bar Association study. The survey pointed to a contrasting pattern: if a black is the victim, the reporting suggested it was the result of racism, but if a Korean American is the victim, the story stressed it was not racially motivated. Disputes between shopkeepers and customers in the tough neighborhoods are all too common, yet I can’t ever recall reading “racial conflict” headlines between black customers and non-Korean businesses.

Not a day passed without my getting calls from the fearful Korean shop owners, wondering aloud if it was their last day on earth. The dreaded moment came on March 16, 1991, a year before the riots erupted. It was a tragic but isolated case in which a fifteen-year-old black girl became the first black person wrongfully killed by a Korean American grocer. Mrs. Soon Ja Du on that fateful day pulled the trigger of a faulty gun in panic, fatally shooting Latasha Harlins during a scuffle at her Empire Market, which police said was under Crips gang terror for eighteen months.

The *Times* devoted twenty-six articles on the Harlins shooting. What troubled the Korean bar association and the immigrant

community was that the stories placed gratuitous emphasis on a "\$1.79 bottle of orange juice." The clear implication of this marathon-running news lead, the lawyers group said, was that Korean Americans valued the life of an African American at less than \$1.79, "a cruel distortion of an intensely human tragedy."

Thus, "the Korean-born grocer killing a black teenager over a \$1.79 bottle of orange juice"—coupled with the grainy chilling segment of the shortened video showing the girl being shot from behind—became one of the most often-used news leads in recent memory. Never mind that the woman grocer was an American citizen.

Would the *Times* writer start a news lead with "the German-born Secretary of State Kissinger"? No way.

It didn't matter that both police and the girl's family members denied the shooting was racially motivated, and that the trial produced no shred of racial implications. The local and national media ignored the crucial facts that the Du family had been subjected to eighteen months of gang terror and violence, that Du didn't know the gun had been tampered with so as to render it hair triggered, and that the grocer was struck in the face four times and knocked down prior to her firing in panic.

As the chilling TV video rolled on in fits and spurts in tandem with sensational "black-Korean conflict" pictures and headlines, pickets, boycotts, firebombings and killings haunted the lives and limbs of the frightened merchants. At the height of the riots, the ABC network and its affiliate KABC showed the sickening sequences *ad nauseam*, as often as the Rodney King beatings by police on TV screens right up to and during the riots.

Little wonder the double outrage was indelibly seared into the minds of viewers, angry young blacks in particular. Overnight, the local media onslaught demolished years of peacemaking efforts among hundreds of black and Korean neighbors, churches and trade associations through endless exchange programs, joint worship services, scholarship programs and neighborhood feeding events.

The specter of racial turf war stalked the embattled storekeepers, as Brotherhood Crusade leader Danny Bakewell—a fire-breathing orator in the fashion of New York City's Reverend Al Sharpton—and his anti-Korean, anti-immigrant ranting filled the airwaves on many radio and TV talk shows.

With his personal charisma and media-savvy staging ability, Bakewell and his cohorts were devastatingly effective in utilizing

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NEWS THIS WEEK (Special Service to subscribers only, except the week of New Year's Day, the 4th of July, the Labor Day, the Super Bowl, the 100th Anniversary of the Republic, the 100th Anniversary of the founding of the United States, and the 100th Anniversary of the founding of Los Angeles.)
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Quote of the week

"They could deploy hundreds of thousands to Iraq in a matter of days, and it took close to 36 hours to set up in Los Angeles. We're just talking about 1,000 or 2,000 people, not 100,000. So I don't understand."

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Manzanar's shameful and valuable legacy



By Dexter Hyatt Kim
Korea Times

"The struggle of men in the struggle against injustice."
Miles Kavuka

Manzanar. The name almost says it all. It reminds me of a small town in the west, and that I have just after President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 in 1942 "evacuating" all people of Japanese descent to internment camps. Manzanar still remains a dark site across America's past, a shameful crime during a peaceful war in U.S. history.

The name almost says it all because during World War II, over 110,000 people of Japanese descent were interned without charges or trial as a result of Executive Order 9066. Ten thousand of them were sent to the Manzanar Relocation Center, one of 10 camps in the United States. In Los Angeles, the result of a "curfew" was the curfew of a ghost town known as Little Tokyo.

The half century since then has seen the Korean American community reborn just as Japan has risen from the rubble of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to become a dominant economic power. Driven by Japan's economic ascent and the U.S. laboring economy, the result is a new and improved Los Angeles. And I believe that the subsequent camp have a story that can serve as a warning of that time when fear and hatred clouded the nation's vision and where patriotism and loyalty were abandoned by millions. But slowly, as people grew up and matured, their experiences seem to be the same that

KOREA TIMES

Weekly English Edition

1 killed, 50 injured and 250 stores looted

Cry Koreatown

List of damaged businesses increase daily

By Richard Hayes Piro
Korea Times

Koreans bore the brunt of terror and fear, as anger and violence raged in Los Angeles in the chaotic aftermath of the Rodney King police beating verdict. Within days of midnight, hundreds of thousands looted and set about 20 fire that destroyed businesses, an office building and at least three shopping centers.

One Korean American man was killed in the violence, and another was undergoing surgery Friday after being shot in the eye.

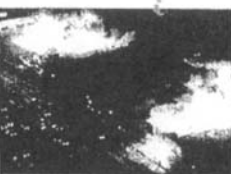
About 50 Korean merchants were reported injured, according to Charles Park, president of the Korean Civic Task Force.

"We read the National Guard. We need backup now," said Asian Security Co. supervisor Gilbert Han, who spent Friday morning a 12-hour barricade to keep more than 100 Koreans safe.

The list of damaged businesses is immense. At least 100 Korean-owned businesses in South Los Angeles were "looted, burned or burned the first night, spread the Community Advisory Council, a coalition group of Korean community organizations. KPWB radio reported Thursday that 150 Korean stores were situated in South Los Angeles.



Left: An unidentified resident of the Crenshaw district of Los Angeles, left, consoles a Korean shop owner over the loss of her store to looters Thursday. Her store was one of more than 300 burned by rioters after the acquittal of four police officers Wednesday in the Rodney King beating trial. Above: ABC Swap Meet and another store in south central Los Angeles burn Wednesday.



Left: An unidentified resident of the Crenshaw district of Los Angeles, left, consoles a Korean shop owner over the loss of her store to looters Thursday. Her store was one of more than 300 burned by rioters after the acquittal of four police officers Wednesday in the Rodney King beating trial. Above: ABC Swap Meet and another store in south central Los Angeles burn Wednesday.

night, spread the Community Advisory Council, a coalition group of Korean community organizations. KPWB radio reported Thursday that 150 Korean stores were situated in South Los Angeles.

"It's just the tip of the iceberg," Park said. "It'll be a lot more than that."

The rampage did not spare even merchants on good relations with customers. Wm. Marketer owner Chung Lee, the epitome of a good merchant, saw customers beat and burn down his store.

"I wanted help for my store. Now I have nothing," wailed Lee, who had done business there for more than 10 years. "I don't know my fate. Who

looted against Friday to give a dollar force of about 20 people.

The destruction in Koreatown came a day after rioters looted and burned with shock that Korean merchants had been hit hard when they opened in South Los Angeles the previous night.

The KPWB also reported that black-owned businesses were left unscathed while Korean businesses were attacked in the same neighborhood.

Hispanic gang members paraded a Korean store from looting in Compton, said Hispanic and black rioters continued people looting a liquor store

in Glendale. Steven Kwok, executive director of the Asian Pacific American Legal Center, said he believed some looters were trying to hit Korean Americans against Asian Americans.

Kwok, Councilman Mike Woo and Police Commissioner Michael Yamaki called a news conference at the legal center Thursday afternoon to denounce the violence and urge its stoppage over the weeks.

"Tuesday was a double disaster for the city of Los Angeles," Woo said. Four days were still unfolding when Friday dawned in Koreatown. Debris from the burning littered the streets, and carless motorists had mangled after the dawn-to-dusk curfew imposed the day before.

The looters had ransacked Berry Market on Western Avenue, Jan's Market on Third, Van County, Thilly Drug Store, BIF, Berger, King, Wertheim and Music Plus on Vermont Avenue.

Much of the looting occurred on Vermont Avenue about Fourth Street and below Eighth Street and on Third

New England Patriots For Tech's Chung, NFL career has special meaning

By Mike Freeman
Washington Post

Eugene Chung was always taught that America is a free country and you can achieve whatever you want to achieve. It was always that simple to him. Never said that when he was growing up in Michigan, Va. he learned on the television set and there were black people and white people and Hispanic people playing professional football and basketball and baseball. He was in Atlanta. He watched where the Asian pro athletes went.

The American Dream is different today to different people. To some the Dream appears as the first step with a winning lottery ticket. To others it is a home in the suburbs with a white picket fence in the garage. But for Chung, a 6-foot-5-inch, 295-pound



Eugene Chung in action as lineman at Virginia Tech.

• See Chung, Page A

Eugene Chung: First KA lineman in pro-football

By Dexter Hyatt Kim
Korea Times

Eugene Chung, the Korean American offensive lineman from Virginia Tech, was recently picked by the New England Patriots in the first round of the 1992 NFL draft.

Selected 13th overall, the 6-foot-5-inch, 295-pound Chung was enthusiastic about the pick.

Although the A.S. American said Patriots' head coach Dick MacPherson had recruited him in high school, he did not expect he would go to New England.

Sam Jankovich, chief executive officer for the Patriots, said the team had made clear its desire for an offensive lineman, and that it considered Chung, who was voted Best Offensive Lineman at Virginia Tech in 1991, the ideal pick.

Coach MacPherson said the

Ice Cube the peacemaker

KA grocers receive apology from rap artist for inflammatory lyrics

By Seapha Ryoung Kim
Korea Times

Ice Cube, whose rap song "Black Korea" has provoked heated violence against Korean grocery stores across the country, has apologized to Korean merchants for his inflammatory lyrics and pledged to work with them to help ease racial tensions between the two communities.

The peace offering grew out of a recent meeting between Ice Cube and Yang B Kim, National Korean American Grocery Association, and David Kim, Southern California KAGRO president.

The February one-hour meeting in Inglewood was arranged by McGrocery River Corp., the company that owns Ice Cube's Premium Lager Beer and had Ice Cube to endorse the product.

The honoratory manufacturer had the rapper after the Korean American grocery group showed its national campaign promoted the company to keep Ice Cube as its spokesman.

Yang B Kim. "He was quiet-spoken, courteous and made a good impression."

Yang B Kim said he told Ice Cube that "Black Korea," which contained such lyrics like "you respect the black fist or we'll beat your own right down to a strip," helped "banish dirty Korean American past."

The two Kim also informed the rapper that Korean merchants have been contributing to the African American community by providing consumer and community services, providing scholarships to needy students and donating food to poor families.

As a peace gesture, said Yang B Kim, Ice Cube told the two Kim that when he tours the nation, he would ask his fans to not commit violence against Korean merchants or anyone else.

The singer also said he would like the KAGRO efforts to work with him in easing the tension between the two communities, Kim added.

After the meeting, Ice Cube wrote a letter of apology to Yang B Kim.

Kim, Ice Cube told the two Kim that when he tours the nation, he would ask his fans to not commit violence against Korean merchants or anyone else.

The singer also said he would like the KAGRO efforts to work with him in easing the tension between the two communities, Kim added.

After the meeting, Ice Cube wrote a letter of apology to Yang B Kim.

In the Feb. 11 issue, Ice Cube said that he will be his intention to offend Koreans or to take violence against any one.

"Ice Cube was not deceived at all

• See Ice Cube, Page 7



Ice Cube meets with David Kim, Southern California KAGRO president.

the guilt-ridden white media in the escalating Korean bashing. His was “a new voice”—so labeled in the sympathetic local media—filling the void after the collapse of the established coalition-minded black leadership, striking a responsive chord in South Central where the black inhabitants felt increasingly squeezed out by the overflow of Latino immigrants and Asian and other ethnic entrepreneurs in their own home territory.

On the morning after the Rodney King verdict by a predominantly white jury acquitting the cops in Ventura County, a building went up in flames just two blocks from my newspaper office on L.A.’s Vermont Avenue. Office workers rushed out and watched the black smoke billowing over the roofs. A young black male driver slowed down alongside the curb and, shaking his fist high, yelled at the shocked Korean employees, “We are gonna kill, kill all of you.”

I wasn’t surprised. Exposed to the same bombardments of the cold-blooded shooting video scene, as he was, any red-blooded young man could have behaved as he did on that fiery morning.

■ The seed of *Sa-ee-gu* was sown years earlier as early arrivals from Korea started setting up shops in predominantly black settlements. In the early 1980s, when I was running *Koreatown Weekly*—the first national English-language newspaper for emerging Korean American communities—I began hearing distant rumbles from the East Coast inner cities.

As a participant/observer of the Civil Rights struggles in the South in the flaming 60s, I was stunned when I happened to come across the screaming banner on the front page of *The New York Amsterdam News* June 4, 1981 issue: “Koreans Dash for Harlem Cash.” The rabidly anti-Semitic weekly’s two-page special report focused on “an anti-Korean hysteria which has gripped the Black merchant community on 125th Street in Harlem.” Beleaguered by the recent influx of Korean businesses, the article said, “the Black merchants vow to fight off this ‘Korean invasion’ on their hustle.”

Citing figures supplied by the head of the 125th Street Business Association, the article said that thirty-two of 137 businesses between 5th Avenue and St. Nicholas Avenue were Korean-owned.

What helped spawn the wave of hysteria?

Quoting an unnamed merchant, the report said, “it is the consensus among some Black leaders. . . that ‘there is a master plan’ on Harlem. The U.S. government is part of that plan ‘and we are somewhat frightened. . .’ This particular merchant believes that ‘the government has turned Korean refugees loose in Harlem.’

“The merchant said that the system had removed the red tape, provided the Koreans with capital and deposited them ‘especially on 125th Street to open up their business.’”

Similar rumors—never challenged nor confirmed—spread across the bleak urbanscape— from Philadelphia to Washington to Chicago—in the forms of news reports among black newspapers while the mainstream media paid no attention to what went on in the subterranean minority communities. These rumors of the Korean-U.S. government “master plan” (one telephone call to any federal agency or congressional office would have scotched the rumor) grew and grew in varying themes until they reached Los Angeles.

In April 1985 alone, four Korean storekeepers were shot to death in robberies. The alarmed Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission helped form the Black-Korean Alliance to build bridges between the two communities. But the fragile alliance evaporated in the rising anti-Korean, anti-immigrant hysteria in the local media. Then came the April 29 explosion.

Throughout, the Korean American perspective was shut out of the local and national media. The TV screens kept bombarding the viewers with the image of desperate merchants firing from the rooftops of their shops, but failed to show that these store owners—abandoned by police and other law enforcement authorities—were returning fire from drive-by shooters.

The vaunted LAPD weren’t there in the crucial early hours of the riot, and many stayed aloof while watching Korean victims lying wounded or beaten. Their chief went AWOL, attending a social event. Neither did the National Guard arrive in time, collecting millions in overtime pay for “doing absolutely nothing,” as one victim who lost her shop complained.

Every political luminary—from President Bush to candidate Clinton—came and belatedly made empty promises. And little or nothing happened. Both L.A. County Sheriff Block and the local FBI chief avowed to prosecute alleged massive civil rights violations against the Korean victims, but absolutely nothing followed.

As the riots-fed May rating sweep moved into full swing, ABC’s popular *Nightline* invited prominent African American leaders to air their views on black-Korean tensions—without inviting their Korean American counterparts. I was mortified when I saw one of the guests tell host Ted Koppel that relations between his and the Korean American community can start improving when Koreans “stop blowing people away.” Koppel, himself an immigrant, neither challenged nor questioned the incendiary remark,



Los Angeles City Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas with Korean businessmen barbecuing at the parking lot of Korean-owned Slauson Swap Meet in South Central Los Angeles, May 1994.

Photograph courtesy of *Korea Times* Los Angeles.

although Harlins was the first black customer wrongly killed by a Korean American grocer.

It didn't matter to Koppel and the civil rights leaders and preachers on his program that since 1990 at least thirteen Korean American merchants were "blown away" at their businesses during holdups by suspects who happened to be Black or Latino. Deluged with protests from Asian American viewers, Koppel invited a Korean American delegation to his show—but it came too late, too little.

In a huge cut-throat media market such as L.A., a racial incident is tailor-made for TV ratings especially when it involves Koreans. Round up the usual suspects. Lights. Camera. Action. Damn the consequences of incendiary TV coverage; praise the Nielsen ratings.

During my three-year stint as an ethnic newspaper editor, I had grown deathly sick of this scenario in the never-never-land of hype and Hollywood. As one of my former staff reporters wryly observed in an ethnic grocery trade journal:

Two African American youths rob a store owned by an Arab American. He shoots one of them and the other one is struck by an oncoming car as he tries to escape across the street.

A Chinese American merchant shoots a patron after a dispute in his store. A news crew arrives on the scene and asks the merchant if he is Korean. After learning he is Chinese, the news crew packs up and leaves without filing a story.

A Korean American grocer shoots a Latino boy who allegedly stole a box of cookies from his store. The “Korean-did-this” story becomes headline news in L.A.

Even in the post-riot and post-Soon Ja Du L.A., shootings occur hourly, but once a Korean grocer is involved in a shooting, it pops up on the media radar and is blown up king size on TV screens.

What if that grocer had been East Indian and had shot a white man? What if he had been Japanese and shot a Vietnamese? What if he had been a white and shot a Korean? Never mind. The “Mean, Greedy Korean” stereotype had become an article of faith in the media mindset.

Two years before the racial firestorm, L.A.’s four largest ethnic papers—the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, a black weekly; *La Opinion*, *Jewish Journal* and *Korea Times*—grew alarmed by the local white media’s tendency to fabricate racial tensions out of isolated incidents. This coalition led a countywide drive to organize the Council of Multicultural Publications that would embrace more than twenty newspapers.

To my relief and delight, the late *Sentinel* publisher Ken Thomas was a good neighbor. His newspaper urged caution and told its readers to stay cool. “There’s no reason for two minorities to be at each other’s throats,” the tall African American told his fellow minority journalists. “We should use the Koreans as our model, not grumble about their success.”

These were the shared concerns of the minority editors:

—A fear of rising racial animosity leveled against their respective community.

—A fear of being singled out as the source of another ethnic group’s problems.

—A resentment of the only big-time paper in town for fomenting racial issues out of isolated incidents in the crime-ridden city.

—The belief that no “outsiders”—especially mainstream news managers—care to understand their specific claim on the American Dream.



Korean American Coalition (from left to right): Ella Stewart (mediator, Martin Luther King Dispute Resolution Center), Diane Taylor (KAC volunteer mediator), Gerald Anderson (businessman), Mr. Lloyd (trainer), Brigitte C. Bellande (private instructor), Kyoung Min Park (KAC volunteer mediator), Guendolynia Davis (City of Los Angeles, KAC volunteer mediator), Charles Kim, (KAC executive director), and John Yoo (4.29 center director).

Photograph courtesy of 4.29 Dispute Resolution and Community Outreach Center

What could these editors of relatively small ethnic newspapers do to reverse the mainstream media-fanned fear and hatred in the Latasha Harlins shooting aftermath?

As initial steps, they attempted to organize a monitoring unit to promote fair and accurate coverage of race relations and to initiate a series of "Know Your Good Neighbor" columns and exchange programs. This joint endeavor—critical to the safety and peace among the fearful minorities—fell on the deaf ears of city officials.

Today, *Sa-ee-gu's* invisible victims stay exhausted in body, spirit and money. Gone are the hopes of recovering their losses. Only a third of them have reopened their businesses. Most have lost their homes and are behind in loan payments. Alcoholism and domestic violence are increasing. Exodus to other cities and states continue. All too common are bankruptcies and post-trauma stresses. Only a fraction of the sacked liquor stores have regained liquor store licenses. Adding insult to injury, city hall politicians and bureaucrats continued to hamper Korean merchants' efforts to get back into their businesses.

Where was the much needed Asian American solidarity during the riots? *Sa-ee-gu* shattered the notion of Asian American unity. The Asian immigrant settlements are a disparate lot—insular and

isolated from each other. Any future coalition remains remote. In contrast, however, pan-Asian American unity has been a steady trend among the English-speaking generations since the late 60s.

Los Angeles Times reporter Elaine Woo, bless her candor, said it all for the non-Korean Asian Americans in her front page article when she publicly confessed she was deathly afraid of being mistaken for a Korean during the riots. Other fearful Asian Los Angelinos—Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese and Filipinos—tried to shy away from the embattled Koreans. Many of them were angry at the Koreans under siege for placing them at risk. Other Asians mistaken for Koreans were beaten, wounded or killed randomly by street mobs even in plain view of onlooking cops.

Sa-ee-gu reminded me of how 120,000 Japanese Americans in the post-Pearl Harbor hysteria were rounded up and herded into desolate internment camps. The Issei's American-born children were citizens but too young to do anything. And Koreans and Chinese alike were proclaiming, "We are not Japanese." A similar fate fell on the children of *Sa-ee-gu*. Mostly in high school and college, they too were too young to prevent or contain the gathering storm.

Throughout, Korean America's U.S.-educated elite professionals—except a splendid few—pretty much stayed away from the maddening crowd of stumbling newcomers. Theirs are two worlds apart. The downtown Koreans and the uptown Koreans are reminiscent of the acculturated, affluent Uptown Jews and the unwashed and stumbling downtown Jews in Manhattan who had fled pogroms in Russia and East Europe at the dawn of this century.

Few ethnic minorities have achieved so much success in higher education, the professions and businesses in such a short timespan as Korean immigrants. Korean engineers and scientists—the bulk of them with Ph.D. degrees—number an estimated 30,000. There are an estimated 5,000 professors on campuses. The number of lawyers is escalating into hundreds, but few work in civil rights/public interest fields. Doctors and medical researchers reach beyond the 6,000 mark. CPA's, financial advisers and business executives run into thousands. Famous Korean names abound among musicians, artists, architects, designers and other creative fields. Silicon Valley is home to a legion of high-tech specialists. But their absence is inconspicuous when it comes to life-threatening crises affecting the lives of the non-English speaking fellow immigrants in the tense urban centers.

At the height of the Korean bashing in L.A., only one letter of protest by a Korean American appeared on the *Los Angeles Times*

editorial page. That lone letter was penned by a UCLA student whose father ran a South Central store.

"I fear for my father's safety and well-being because of the way the media have perpetuated the problem existing in South Central Los Angeles," Soo Hyun Lim wrote then-editor Shelby Coffey, under whose stewardship the behemoth paper wittingly or unwittingly contributed so much to fanning the black-Korean conflict.

"My father is a Korean American merchant in South Central L.A. and as his son, I fear for his life every day. Both minority groups are trying hard to endure their cultural differences and are having a difficult time just surviving," the grocer's son from Balboa Island said.

"However, the media consistently misrepresents how these groups exists which in turn is pitting African Americans and Korean Americans against each other. Yet this friction is what both groups are trying so hard to overcome."

(The post-riot *Times* is like day from night. To its credit, the only paper in town has undergone a visible metamorphosis in covering the dizzily evolving demographics. An irony is that it takes a riot to help bring about the needed change. When Watts burned in 1965, its first black reporter was hired on the spot. Veteran Korean American reporter Connie Kang was recruited from her *San Francisco Examiner* in the smoldering aftermath of *Sa-ee-gu*. In hindsight, I daresay, had there been ten Connie Kangs in the local media, the Soon Ja Du media hysteria might have been contained to minimum.)

Few outsiders may fathom the depth of hardship, sorrow and danger involved in running a family grocery store in a nowhere neighborhood. "I pray to God every night to protect my dad and the store," wrote college student Young Kim. "Asking God for financial security made me feel so guilty because I felt I was praying for money only. Deep inside it wasn't about money. I could see the look of frustration and stress on my parents' faces. I can't remember one good smile on them. They were trying to hide the pain from my brother and me."

Such is the everyday fate of probably the most misrepresented and maligned ethnic group in this nation of immigrants.

I have attended too many funerals and covered too many shootings to not dread running into headlines of killings in ethnic Korean newspapers. Their *Pal'ja* is like that of Sisyphus condemned to push the boulder back up the hill only to have it roll down again forever—in order to provide a safe cocoon for their children

until they enter college while literally putting their lives on the line ten to twelve hours a day, seven days a week.

✎ Fractious Korean body politic is centuries old, deeply rooted in the interminable Neo-Confucian factionalism during the latter part of the Yi dynasty, along with regional discrimination against the Cholla Province (the southwestern part of Korea) and its inhabitants since the beginning of the previous Koryo dynasty.

To Koreans, at home or abroad, divisiveness comes as naturally as eating kimchi at each meal time. K. Connie Kang, who covers the burgeoning Asian American community for the *Los Angeles Times*, said it so succinctly of Korean collective behavior.

“Try grabbing a fistful of sand, and see what happens,” she wrote some years ago. “Put us together in a room to work out a program, and the worst in us will surface and we will fight forever.”

It’s an eerie feeling when I hear similar refrains from American-born children of our first pioneer immigrants who came to America 100 years ago.

“This divisiveness is not only true among the new immigrants but among the old,” said retired Colonel Young Oak Kim, among the first American-born of the first wave of Korean immigrants. “It was bad.”

So bad, recalled former Olympic diving champion Dr. Sammy Lee, who grew up with Colonel Kim in L.A., once told me that he quit going to the Korean church his parents had forced him to accompany them to, as soon as he grew old enough to say no. “Those adults in church were fighting like dog and cat, sometimes with fists.”

“Why are Koreans so divisive? I don’t know,” Colonel Kim wondered aloud.

“Why do they lie and cheat and tear each other apart?” ask many second-generation activists more in exasperation than anger.

Take Korean churches, the most important social institution for Korean immigrants in the host society. In L.A. alone, there are more than 700 and still counting. Immigrant congregations routinely split over disagreements of one kind or another. Splitting is so common that updating on the current number is a difficult chore.

Little wonder Koreatown’s post-riot recovery efforts faded into the L.A. smog, after bickering among the various victims support groups over allegations and counter-allegations of misuse or abuse of money and office.

Over the past two decades, I have never known a full year to pass without some kind of squabble involving stolen elections, lawsuits, misuse of money or office and just plain bad blood. Literally hundreds of thousands of dollars have gone toward litigations in the courtrooms, a boon to the lawyering trade.

There are precious few activists among the 1.5 and second generation who have chosen to work with first-generation community organizations. But they tend to stay away from first-generation activities because they have been "burned" all too often.

Typical is Seattle activist Michael Park's experience. "The only thing I learned from a Korean-type meeting is that almost everybody is a leader, president or chairman of this or that organization."

Contrary to popular belief, there's no homogeneous Korean America. Geography no longer can define its boundaries. It's an ever-shifting mosaic made of several mini-tribes separated by generation, class, culture and language, and even race—all scattered across the continent: the mainstream consisting of those who have settled in Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco and other urban inner cities after the immigration flood gate opened in 1965; American-educated professionals; 150,000 orphans adopted by American families; more than 100,000 Korean women married to former military servicemen in Korea; and acculturated and scattered descendants of the first wave of Korean immigrants in the early 1900s.

Ironically, the mainstream of Korean America—nearly 70 percent and crippled by language and culture barriers—make up its most vulnerable segment in inhospitable urban space. Herein lies the Korean American predicament. Not only do the riot victims feel they were abandoned by all levels of government, as well as by the Asian American community, but also by their English-speaking children who purport to represent them in the mainstream society.

A spokesman for the riots victims told *Times* reporter Kang, "They may look Korean but they don't think like us." Language and culture separate them. They are just like two ships passing without exchanging signals. The frames of reference are wide apart. The frame of reference for immigrants is Korea, and the latter's America. That's why I have long nursed the feeling of cosmic sorrow over our predicament.

While stereotypes abound, the perception that Korean Americans are business-oriented is accurate. In Los Angeles, government statistics show 35 percent of 150,000 Korean residents are self-employed. Based on updated data, Koreatown insiders figure Korean residents in the Southland number half-a-million. More than 40



A racial harmony event in front of Korean-owned Happy Market, May 1993.

Photographs courtesy of *Korea Times* Los Angeles.

percent of them are engaged in grocery markets, cafes, gasoline stations, clothing and dry cleaning. The rate is higher when accountants, lawyers, real estate specialists and other professions are included. One reverse trend: only 11 percent of their American-born children stay self-employed.

In South Central, 225 Korean-owned grocery and liquor stores now number 45 percent of the trade in the predominantly black district. That's the Korean-black flash point, where nearly 90 percent of the Korean-run businesses were targeted during *Sa-ee-gu*. And that's where the Korean American Coalition (KAC)—an activist vanguard of the 1.5 and second generations—has been quietly operating the 4.29 Dispute Resolution Center since 1997.

In its third year of operation, the Center typically handles ten dispute cases a month involving Korean shopowners and neighborhood customers. The mission: Help resolve customer complaints with Korean merchants, and prevent possible escalation of racial and social problems. Slowly but steadily it's showing results.

Veteran community worker John S. Yoo, in charge of the biracial staff, is a 1.5 generation, bilingual and bicultural—at home with both black and Korean cultures—ideally suited for the sensitive job. A realist at heart and neutral in mediation efforts, Yoo walks the thin straight line in the tinderbox zone of race, distrust and fear. Yoo is struck by deeply seated biases on both sides born of mutual ignorance of each other's cultures. The long-standing black com-

plaint: Koreans own stores and make money but don't live there and don't hire Blacks. They are rude and stingy and don't give credit to poor customers.

Observes Yoo: Their stores are in "Penny Business" dealing in nickels and dimes with thin margins of profit. A chocolate candy costs 60 cents, and the grocer gets 5 to 6 cents in profit. They routinely live with vandalism, shoplifting and robberies and sometimes shootings. Surveillance videos are there to prevent common shoplifting and for the safety of operators and employees.

More important, Yoo reports, a recent KAC canvass of 100 Korean shops in South Central shows more than 70 percent of them hired one black employee or more. But the race relations specialist doesn't spare the Korean merchants easily:

They tend to look down on many customers as jobless and idle, addicted to alcohol and drugs with criminal records, prone to shoplift.

They come to black neighborhoods to make money but they won't embrace black culture. They don't look at them as customers but the objects of their business.

Before going to work, they listen to news on Korean TV and radio, read Korean newspapers at work, and back home watch TV news from Korea, then Korean video dramas. Then they complain they have trouble with English.

They come to the country which is all community-centered, but they shy away from community activities and issues. They have very little to do with community. Yet they complain they are politically powerless.

They were devastated by the riot, but they see no solutions. It's no use trying. Like *Naembee* (Korean aluminum pan), they get hot and cold fast—forgive and forget.

He concludes: "They work hard and long, and share danger with family members. They buy nice cars, own nice homes, and play golf and send kids to good schools. That's their *Hahn-Pulli*. That's their *Pal'ja*."

This *Hahn Pulli* touches both sides of the Pacific, growing out of this thing called *Hahn*—the everlasting woe—turning into the ever-unquenched hunger for money and power by any means at the expense of values or shame.

Korean history is an unending series of oppressions, both foreign and domestic, from the distant Yi Dynasty to the 1910-1945 Japanese occupation, followed by the 1945 division of Korea, and

the ensuing 1950 Korean War, topped off by a series of dictatorships and onto the October, 1997, economic collapse in the south, and let's not forget the enduring Stalinist hell in the north.

At every upheaval since ancient times, it was the privileged elite who have trampled the rule of law they created and betrayed the common folk. Thus almost every president on down to grass-roots, this *Hahn-Pulli* in so many shapes of corruption has degenerated into an all-consuming way of life at almost every level of society. A generational mantra, "Everybody is doing it."

The similar *Hahn Pulli* has been unfolding on this shore 8,000 miles away climaxing in *Sa-ee-gu*. Have our *kyopo* (fellow countrymen) learned anything from *Sa-ee-gu*? Individually, yes, but collectively, nothing.

"*Sa-ee-gu* was truly a wakeup call to American reality for most Korean immigrants," assesses Professor Edward Taehan Chang of UC-Riverside, one of the "splendid few" who have been on the community action frontline for years. Along with Professor Eui-Young Yu of Cal State Los Angeles, first-generation, and Professor Elaine Kim of UC-Berkeley, third-generation, Chang has tirelessly sought building coalitions with other minorities.

On the whole, Chang observes, "they began to realize that economic survival is not the goal but a means to improve their quality of life. There were genuine attitude changes among many. . . . In retrospect, however, they have already forgotten about *Sa-ee-gu*. They don't want to recall *Sa-ee-gu* as part of their collective memory."

He agrees that "Korean elites have betrayed their community and society." He says the Korean immigrant community cries out for role models and leadership to lead them in the right direction. The Korean elites weren't there on the scene to provide that crucial role model, Chang notes.

Not all is gloom and doom. The fledgling latter-day American Revolution has been unfolding in pockets of Koreatowns, campuses and congregations, out of sight and out of mind from the mainstream.

On the forefront is the Korean American Coalition—a coalition of a "splendid few" first-generation activists led by Xerox engineer Keith Kim (Kim Kisoon) and the vanguard of the 1.5 and second generation. The emerging Korean equivalent of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), it has become a truly national organization by establishing a liaison

office in Washington, D.C. with a string of local branches in the West Coast.

It all started in 1983 with a desk and a telephone, and a passionate vision nursed by a handful of what is now called the 1.5 generation—T.S. Chung, Charles Kim, Duncan Lee, Yoon Hee Kim, and Davis S. Kim, to cite a few early “warm bodies.”

I wrote this headline in the *Koreatown English Weekly* I founded: “1.5 generation a Bridge between Cultures.”

The first executive director, Charles Kim, defined his bilingual and bicultural generation as those who came here as children and grew up between two cultures. Their historical task: Help solve the problems of the largely non-English-speaking immigrant community.

They have come a long way since. Their first president—community lawyer T. S. Chung—has become the highest-ranking Korean American in the Clinton administration as an executive in the commerce department.

KAC activists have held citizenship training sessions for immigrants, registered more than 70 percent of the Korean voters in the South-land, and helped thousands to apply for citizenship. KAC is counseling Korean businesses with new business opportunities and technology. Its Jewel-in-the-Crown is the 4.29 mediation center in the heart of South Central.

Just last month a cooperative project unheard of in Koreatown history was quietly announced. Its five major community service organizations all run by 1.5 and second generations—the KAC, Korean Youth and Community Center, Korean American Museum, Korean American Family Service Center and Korean Health Education, Information and Research Center—unveiled a joint plan to build a \$1.5 million building where immigrants will have access to services at one stop.

It’s nothing short of a miracle in the historically factious community where communal joint programs would so often end up in interminable squabbles. As a recent Los Angeles Human Relations Commission study report lamented, “Unlike those of Chinese descent, Los Angeles Korean community, while highly organized, is considerably fractured. . .

“Amidst all this heterogeneity, it is very difficult to find representatives who will speak for everyone. This lack of a strong, community-based mediating organization may be an important factor complicating relations between Koreans and the rest of L.A.”

On the political front, Korean America now can boast of nine 1.5 and second generation appointees in the Clinton administra-

tion including KAC founding president T. S. Chung, a commerce department executive, and civil rights lawyer Angela Oh, a member of the President's Advisory Board on Race, who first rose to national prominence as an articulate spokesperson for Korean Americans on ABC's *Nightline* during *Sa-ee-gu*.

On local and state electoral scenes, first-generation candidates are making sporadic appearances with mixed results but most of them aren't giving up easily.

The 1998 criminal conviction of the first Korean American in Congress—former Representative Jay C. Kim, 59, of Diamond Bar—for federal election law violations has brought a permanent stain on the Korean and Korean American image as well as a sobering warning that future Korean American aspirants should eschew exploiting ethnic nationalism, and instead, focus on community issues.

☞ In the post-*Sa-ee-gu* era, coping with the darker side of *Hahn* is heard often among the emerging American-born generation. Addressing a UC-San Diego gathering in 1996, political science major Eugene J. Kim spoke of “our parents influencing and persuading us to adopt their value system of survival, success at any cost.”

“But we are born here, live here and will probably die here,” Kim reminded his peers. “We have responsibility to our community. That’s why we have to examine the authenticity of our ambitions (for success). . . . Most of all, we need a new value system that will prevent *Sa-ee-gu* from ever happening again.”

A similar call for sublimating the *Hahn* for positive community action was echoed throughout at the 13th Annual Korean American Students Conference (KASCON) at Stanford University and UC-Berkeley in late March. In attendance were 1,000 of the “best and brightest” from nearly 100 colleges and universities.

Sa-ee-gu's legacy was the all-consuming topic at the three-day conference. The gathering's rallying manifesto: “Release the *Hahn* and use it to motivate ourselves to change the world so that rage and sorrow will no longer be the common bond among Korean Americans. . . . Rather, as future leaders, every one of us is personally responsible for ensuring that our future will result in a sense of triumph and achievement.”

This first-generation immigrant calls on fellow diasporic Koreans to stop wallowing in the churning cauldron of *Hahn*. I hear the drumbeat from our distant past summoning us to a larger cause: Unite, wretched Koreans, you have nothing to lose but your an-

cient chain of *Hahn*. It's no *cliché* the torch has been passed onto our children's generation.

Today, our second-generation offspring born and bred in the shadow of their parents' *Hahn* are bidding, "Goodbye *Hahn*." Hand-in-hand, across gritty Koreatowns, vanguards of the 1.5 and second generation are greeting, "Good Morning, Community Conscience."

It's their historic turn to embark on a Long March in search of an abiding American ethos called community consciousness and conscience—the very spoke of a communal wheel that holds a mosaic of people from distant shores together, instead of ethnic tribes fighting for their own turf, in an increasingly multiracial and multicultural urban space called L.A.

And this unfolding grassroots movement sparked by our Korean American activists is destined to set a luminous precedent for their parents' homeland—the Land of Mourning Calm—which had met the latest of an unending series of reckonings of *Hahn* in last year's economic collapse.

✘ It may take a hundred years—perhaps 1,000 years—to heal our scarred *seoul*, but let us take the first step toward liberating ourselves from our own existential *Hahn* and, in its place, help forge a new core value of community and civic culture in this nation of immigrants.

In the final analysis, *Sa-ee-gu* was a defining moment for diasporic Koreans everywhere. 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. Theirs is a beautiful conclusion to a long journey—an epic with a great ending.

Sa-ee-gu may be the beginning of a tribe of latter-day Jews, the Koreans. The larger picture may emerge a few generations from now. It will become an epic—the first Korean liberation from the ancient affliction of *Hahn*.

Either that, or Korean Americans will end up as a mere footnote in American history: Koreans were smart and self-reliant but selfish people.