

1 killed, 50 injured and 250 stores looted

Cry Koreatown

List of damaged businesses increase daily

By Richard Reyes Fruto
Korea Times

Koreatown bore the brunt of terror and fire, as anger and violence ravaged Los Angeles in the chaotic aftermath of the Rodney King police beating verdict.

Within days of madness, thousands of marauders looted and set about 20 fires that destroyed restaurants, 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 Koreatown Crime Task Force.

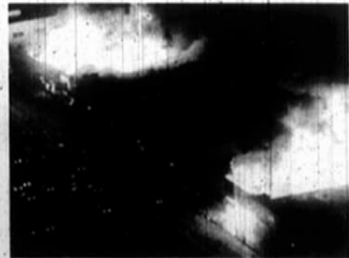
"We need the National Guard. We need backup now," said Axiom Security Co. supervisor Gilbert Han, who spent Friday manning a 12-car barricade around a swap meet east of Koreatown.

The list of damaged businesses is increasing.

At least 100 Korean owned businesses in South Los Angeles were vandalized, looted or burned the first



Left: An unidentified resident of the Grenshaw district of Los Angeles, left, consoles a Korean shop owner over the loss of her store to rioters 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 Grenshaw district of Los Angeles, left, consoles a Korean shop owner over the loss of her store to rioters 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, quoted the Community Advisory Council, a coalition voice of Korean community organizations. KTVB radio reported Thursday that 150 Korean stores were attacked in South Los Angeles.

"It's just the tip of the iceberg," Park said. "It'll be a lot more than that." Meanwhile, the *Korea Times* estimated that about 190 stores were vandalized and looted in Koreatown. On Friday, Mayor Tom Bradley said that Koreatown is a top priority for National Guard troops.

Reports and rumors swept the city that marauders were targeting Korean stores and Koreatown in retribution for festering grievances, including the probation sentence for Soon Ji Du in the killing of Latasha Hartins.

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

"I worked hard for that store. Now I have nothing," wailed Lee, who had done business there for more than 10 years. "I don't know my future. Where

can I go?"

Korean Americans took up arms to defend their businesses. Seven community organizations banded together Friday to form a defense force of about 220 people.

The destruction in Koreatown came a day after community leaders realized with shock that Korean merchants had been hit hard when riots erupted in South Los Angeles the previous night.

But Asian American community leaders emphasized that the unrest was random and indiscriminate, pointing out that African American Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas's field office in South Los Angeles also burned to the ground in the unrest.

But KPWB also reported that black-owned businesses were left untouched while Korean businesses were attacked in the same neighborhood. Yet radio and TV also reported that Hispanic gang members guarded a Korean store from looters in Compton, and Hispanic and black residents confronted people looting a liquor store

in Gardena. Stewart Kwah, executive director of the Asian Pacific American Legal Center, said he believed some media were trying to pit Korean Americans against African Americans.

Kwah, Councilman Mike Woo and Police Commissioner Michael Yamaki called a news conference at the legal center Thursday afternoon to denounce the violence and voice their outrage over the verdict.

"Yesterday was a double disaster for the city of Los Angeles," Woo said.

Four fires were still smoldering when Friday dawned in Koreatown. Debris from the looting littered the streets, and curious onlookers had resurfaced after the dawn-to-dusk curfew imposed the day before.

The looting had ransacked Boys Market on Western Avenue, Jon's Market on Third, Vons Grocery, Thrifty Drug Store, BIF, Burger King, Warehouse and Music Plus on Vermont Avenue.

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

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New England Patriots

For Tech's Chung, NFL career has special meaning

grocery store Thursday night. They were armed with handguns and shotguns, and local residents brought them ammunition.

Koreatown Plaza, the largest shopping center in the area, came under attack that noon. About 30 people broke the windows, but unarmed security guards repelled them with fire extinguishers.

"Koreatown right now is under siege," said Black Korean Alliance co-chairman Bong Hwan Kim at the news conference that afternoon at the legal center. "It's just utter chaos right now."

More fires flared mid-afternoon. By 4 p.m., smoke from the fires in Koreatown and neighborhoods in the east and west had cast a gray pall over the city.

Other Koreatown residents joined Korean Americans in the defense of the neighborhood. Hispanic neighbors toting AK-47s fired several rounds at arsonists who tried to set fire to the Korean Television American Network building at First Street and Vermont.

Security officers and armed tenants defended Olympic Discount Swap Meet in the east and L.A. Slauson Swap Meet in the south.

At L.A. Slauson, they fired shots in the air to throw back attempts to break into the parking lot and the building.

The looting slackened significantly Friday, and sightseers drove through with cameras and video cameras. About 500 Korean Americans rallied at Western Avenue and Wilshire Boulevard at 1 p.m. to call an end to the violence.

But as twilight approached Friday, Korean Americans prepared for more violence. Residents crowded Ralphs and California Market to stock up on



KA youths put up barricades and stand guard at Olympic Boulevard and Western Avenue to prevent looting.

groceries just in case unrest forced businesses to shut down again. The swap meet militias clamored for the National Guard, asking what was taking them so long to occupy looted neighborhoods.

"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," said L.A. Slauson manager Jay Lee. "We're just talking about 1,000 or 2,000 people, not 100,000. So I don't understand."

Meanwhile, police and Koreatown civic leaders appealed to armed citizens not to shoot looters and to use force only in self-defense.

"That's my utmost concern," Park said. "I'd like to make sure these people—excited, emotionally disturbed and tired—do not violate the law. (They should only shoot) when their lives are threatened or other lives are threatened."

Meanwhile, the mayor's office appealed to Korean grocers to keep their stores open in South Los Angeles, but the Korean American Grocers Association said it will instruct its members to do so only if authorities can guarantee their safety.

Brenda Palk Sunoo, Sophia Kyung Kim, Kay Hwangbo and Peter Park contributed to this report.

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Street between Vermont and Normandie avenues.

The Warehouse and Music Plus shopping centers at Second Street were torched. A double-deck mini-mall at Western Avenue and Sixth Street was completely destroyed. Four fires were set in a one-block area on Third Street.

The siege in Koreatown began at midday Thursday after a probable arson fire at an apartment building under construction on New Hampshire Avenue near Third Street spread to adjacent structures.

"In-freaking-credible," said a black man watching in disbelief as the flames engulfed the unfinished apartments. "This is total anarchy."

"These guys are just roaming around picking a spot," said a white man.

The blaze attracted a crowd, and the looting started when it turned into a mob. They picked through Thrifty's and Vons', and the looting continued north on Vermont when police came and formed a skirmish line.

By early afternoon, all businesses and offices in Koreatown were shut down. Jittery Korean Americans abandoned their apartments upon hearing rumors that marauders were descending upon Koreatown that night.

"We fled for our safety. We heard the TV saying that blacks were gathering and coming northward," said court interpreter Paul Yi, who spent Thursday night at his parents' house in La Verne.

But Yi said many others stayed. "There's too much at stake in Koreatown."

At California Market on Western Avenue, the employees stacked up shopping carts, wooden pallets and milk crates against the glass windows, and they

driveways with trash cans. Five self-styled militia men guarded the