

Death of a black teen-ager

Blacks and Koreans join hands to heal wounds

By **Richard Reyes Fruto**
Korea Times

Federal mediator Jan Jung-min Sunoo felt a creeping premonition when he picked up the Sunday paper March 17 and read that a grocer in south Los Angeles had shot and killed a customer.

Sunoo, also president of the Los Angeles City Human Relations Commission, had an inkling that the victim was African American and the merchant was Korean. He also knew what the shooting meant for black-Korean relations.

Luckily, black and Korean leaders have been sensitized to the problem, and the peace-making mechanism had been in place since the four killings of Korean merchants in April 1986.

These developments took place in the days following the March 16 shooting:

- On March 18, Korean and black organizations met separately to devise a response to defuse a volatile situation arising from longstanding tensions between the two ethnic groups.

- On March 19, representatives from the city and county human relations commissions, Mayor Tom Bradley's office and Korean, black and Latino groups met at City Hall and issued a statement expressing hope that tensions won't escalate.

- On March 21, Korean community leaders released their own statement in response to the shoot-



Latasha Harlins



KT Photo

Empire Liquor Market in South Los Angeles

Statement of African American and Korean American community leaders

We are shocked and appalled at the circumstances surrounding the death of Latasha Harlins on March 16, 1991. We extend our deepest sympathy to her family and friends.

This senseless loss of a young girl's life reflects the worse type of violence perpetrated upon a consumer by a merchant.

At the same time, we are deeply concerned that this terrible incident of violence does not aggravate the relationship between African Americans and Korean Americans in our communities. Nor that the work of healing by African Americans and Korean Americans of goodwill over the past years will be washed away by the anger over this incident.

Since the spring of 1986, many African American and Korean Americans have worked together to build bridges of understanding between the two communities through the Black-Korean Alliance, church exchanges, joint business ventures, mediation projects, educational events, trips to Korea for African American community leaders, merchant support of community events and fund raisings, and mutual political support of community needs. These positive achievements reflect years of hard work and trust building and should not be destroyed by one tragic incident.

The death of Latasha Harlins challenges us to come together as a united multicultural community and acknowledge the often

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