

Media under fire: For escalating ethnic tension



Media panel included Korea Times English Edition editor **K.W. Lee**, KCBS news director **Jose Rios** (fifth and sixth from left), Los Angeles Sentinel CEO **Kenneth Thomas**, Los Angeles Times metro editor **Craig Turner** and KCOP news director **Jeff Wald** (first to third from right).

By **Richard Reyes Fruto**
Korea Times

The aunt of Latasha Harlins and second-generation Korean American leaders last Tuesday bitterly accused the white media of sensationalizing incidents involving blacks and Koreans as racial problems.

K.W. Lee, editor of the Korea Times English Edition, also criticized his mainstream counterparts for treating the issue in "15-second sound bytes."

Kenneth Thomas, chief executive officer of the black-owned Los Angeles

Sentinel, likewise declared that tensions between the two ethnic groups is "media-exacerbated, if not media-created."

"I do not see the racial conflict that the media constantly puts up," said Gina Rae of the Latasha Harlins Justice Committee, a group formed after the black teen-ager was fatally shot in an altercation with a Korean grocer.

About 150 people attended a "town hall meeting" at the Los Angeles Times to discuss media coverage of the major stories in 1991 that affected minorities.

The panel of 10 news executives included representatives from the Los

Angeles Times, Los Angeles Daily News and radio and TV stations. Three local ethnic journalists groups sponsored the forum.

Most criticism of coverage of black-Korean relations was directed at the Los Angeles Times and the TV stations.

Lee made the strongest indictment when he blamed the Times for contributing to what he called the Lebanonization of the city with coverage that allegedly polarizes communities, rather than healing and calming tensions.

► See **Media**, Page 7

Media

from page 1

"The white media is responsible for exacerbation of the city of Los Angeles becoming a Lebanon," Lee said. "The Los Angeles Times and the TV stations are jacking up their (readerships and ratings) at the expense of the lives and limbs of blacks and Koreans in turmoil."

A member of the Latasha Harlins Justice Committee even held up the Korea Times's coverage as an example of more accurate reporting of the issue.

"They have bent over backwards to be objective and fair in its reporting," said David, who identified himself only by his first name. "Unfortunately, even in the case of the Sentinel, I cannot make the same assertion, not to mention other parts of the media."

Black-Korean Alliance members Marcia Choo and T.S. Chung also criticized TV stations for running stories that feature blacks only.

But KCBS news director Jose Rios

and KCOP news director Jeff Wald said their reporters often cannot find KA leaders who want to talk. Rios blamed KAs for wanting to downplay the problems.

"Yes, we do have to participate," Choo said angrily. "But when you present the news, it's your responsibility. It's your job. You have to go that extra mile first."

Ed Chang, an ethnic studies professor at Cal Poly Pomona and a recognized expert on black-Korean relations, said local reporters never call him for comment while he gets phone calls from across the country.

"We'd be more than happy to talk with you, and if we're not available, there are other leaders who would be more than happy to talk with you," said Korean American Coalition president Gary Kim.

Again and again, blacks and Koreans criticized the media for overplaying the racial element in incidents between blacks and Koreans.

"Stop overglamorizing your stories whatever they are," said John Nance of the NAACP. "Try to bring us together rather than separate us."