

Son's cry before Du's conviction:

'My mother is a scapegoat'

By **Richard Reyes Fruto**
Korea Times

Joseph Du wore the same tired, pained expression on his face whenever he accompanied his mother to court in the last seven months. His face showed the pain and anger of a man who felt his mother was being persecuted.

"My mother is a scapegoat by somebody up there, and we're not getting any support at all," said Soon Ja Du's oldest son. "My mother was brutally beaten up. She was knocked down four times."

His bitterness welled up as he talked three weeks ago in an empty corridor outside the courtroom where the prosecutor and defense attorneys were selecting jurors.

Du, 30, bitterly noted there was not one Korean among the 135 prospective jurors called for his mother's trial.

At the end, the jury was made up of five blacks and seven whites and Hispanics, with three blacks among the four alternates. There were no Asians.

Du said the Korean community turned its back on his family but closed ranks behind Tae Sam Park, raising money for him when black activists started a boycott of his store.

The Korean American Race Relations Emergency Fund, for example, raised \$54,000, most of which eventually will go to Park as he puts the store up for sale as part of an agreement with the boycott organizers.



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Soon Ja Du and son Joseph.

Scapegoat

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Du said he asked the Korean American Grocers Association for any kind of help. "They said they were busy."

Du said police used his mother's case to divert public attention from the beating of Rodney G. King, a videotaped incident that horrified the nation and prompted an investigation of the Los Angeles Police Department.

He had been saying that since the district attorney's office announced its intention to charge his mother with murder. The shooting happened March 16, two weeks after the King beating.

Du said Koreans are being "victimized" by "bandits" ever since the Latasha Harlins shooting inflamed black-Korean relations.

"This is time we have to get together to stand for what is right for the community," Du said. "If nobody's going to stand up, I will do it myself, my own organization."

Koreans need a counterpart to the Brotherhood Crusade and Nation of Islam in the black community, Du argued, saying he would be honored to lead it.

"The black people, I'm not saying they're all bad, but somebody is using this little issue to achieve their goal," he said. "Black people, just because they're black, they're trying to take it out on somebody else."

The second generation of Korean Americans must learn a lesson from all this turmoil, Du said.

"What happened to my mother and us could happen to anybody in the Korean community," he said.

The trial of his mother is even more tragic because the Du family endured 18 months of threats and thefts under the Crips, a black street gang operating in the

neighborhood of the store where the shooting occurred.

The reign of terror started when the Dus bought the store in 1989. According to authorities, gang members brazenly stole merchandise from the Dus and threatened to kill them or burn the store down.

The terror ended only when Joseph Du finally reported the incidents to the police last December, but not before about a dozen Crips came to the store at closing time and threatened to kill him if he insisted on pressing charges.

Police arrested three men who pled guilty to extortion, grand theft, robbery, burglary and dissuading a witness.

"I'm up to here," Du said, raising his hand neck-high. "I can't take it anymore."

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Asian Pacific American Legal Center; and Bong Hwan Kim, Korean Youth Center.

Some of the black representatives included: Danny Bakewell, Brotherhood Crusade; Marva Smith Battle-Bey, Vermont Slauson Economic Development Corp.; Patsy Brown, Papa's Grocery; Ken Thomas, Los Angeles Sentinel; Dennis Westbrook, Martin Luther King Dispute Resolution Center; and Larry Aubry, Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission.

The meeting was significant, said Wong, in that it pointed out that "there are many players in the African American community other than Danny Bakewell. And there are other issues in black-Korean relations than Tae Sam Park."