

# Getting to the root of Korean-black tensions

Cal State LA holds symposium on race relations



Fielding questions at a recent symposium on black-Korean relations are, from left: **Bong Hwan Kim**, KYC executive director; **Gallen Reeves**, co-chairman of the Black-Korean Alliance; **George Umezawa**, EPIC director; the **Rev. Kap Soo Cho**, Oriental Mission Church and the **Rev. Joseph Griffin**, Good Shepherd Baptist Church.

By **Kay Hwangbo**  
Korea Times

Tensions between Korean merchants and black customers are mainly the result of political and economic failures, panelists said at a recent symposium on black-Korean relations.

"My people do not target the most correct targets for the problem," said Larry Aubry, a consultant with the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission and a black. "Koreans

aren't the problem; institutions are the problem."

Cultural differences, misunderstandings and skewed media coverage were also named as culprits by the speakers at Cal State Los Angeles on May 22 and 23.

Fifty-four people attended the first panel of the forum, "Roots of the Problems." The audience was made up mostly of Asians, with some whites and a few blacks.

At times, speakers seemed to be

• See **Cal State LA**, Page 8

## Cal State LA

continued from page 1

exploring the causes of the recent riots as much as the roots of conflicts between Korean merchants and their black customers in South Central Los Angeles.

Both problems have their roots in blacks' anger toward economic discrimination, racial bias and Korean merchants' perceived condescension, according to the panelists.

Aubry, like many of his colleagues, discussed the difficulty of being black in a racially biased society. The roots of the problem go back to American slavery, he said, which severed family and cultural ties.

But the consultant stood out from others by using unusually strong language.

"Young African American children are being brutalized by the system simply because they are black," he said. "They were cannon fodder for the National Guard."

In a statement unexpected from a government administrator, Aubry said he will never contribute to the system that "craps on me and always has, ever since I was born in the South."

Jai Lee Wong, another consultant with the county human relations commission, cited "the system," race, class, misunderstandings and stereotypes for causing problems between black customers and Korean store owners.

She warned that if relations between the two are not improved, Korean stores will be targeted again.

Alex Norman, social-work professor emeritus at UCLA, said the black-Korean conflict has economic causes with some "cultural overtones." Koreans in black areas have been taking away jobs and business opportunities from local blacks because they work for lower wages, said Norman, who is black.

Competition for scarce resources will likely contribute to more conflict between minorities, Norman predicted.

Byran Jackson, a political science professor at Cal State L.A., said racial and class tensions were contributing factors in the riots. The country is even more divided along race lines now than in 1965, said Jackson, who is black. He said the participation of Latinos and other minorities, as well as blacks, in the riots shows that there is also a class problem.

Different ethnic groups must go beyond selfish agendas to form a new agenda "to provide justice for all, regardless of the ethnicity of the person," the political scientist said.

Col. Young O. Kim, a decorated World War II hero and Asian American community leader, talked about the history of oppression shared by Korea and the African American community. Blacks suffered from discriminatory laws and military deployment practices from the 1930s through the Vietnam War, Kim said.

Cultural beliefs unconsciously held by Asians, that they are at the center of the universe, have created frictions in business relationships with others, Kim said.

"I really liked it," said So Yun Roe, a USC graduate student, of the panel discussion. "I got a lot of new ideas."

Other panels were titled: "Similarities and Differences—Culture and Experience," "Current Issues" and "Resolution and Alliance."