

Soul-to-Seoul healing

Biggest black-KA meeting in L.A. history held in Watts

By **Richard Reyes Fruto**
Korea Times

Blacks and Koreans made history by renewing calls for peace at the first mass meeting between merchants and consumers on April 8.

The forum was held in South Central Los Angeles to share concerns about racial tensions between the two ethnic groups in the wake of the Latasha Harlins shooting.

"Not using this tragedy as something to build on would be a lessening of our humanity," said Councilman Robert Farrell in an appeal for mutual understanding.

The two-hour forum took place in a crowded church in the heart of Watts. The meeting began with the same old accusations against Ko-



African American merchant Nick Usery points to similar problems such as crime shared by black and Korean merchants.

rean merchants, but organizers quickly shut down any acrimonious debate.

The meeting ended on a posi-

tive note, with most people agreeing that blacks and Koreans alike must seek peaceful co-existence.

"To work together, we have to

understand each other," said Walter Kim, who had asked blacks and Koreans to take turns standing up and applauding each other.

The meeting adjourned with a meal of soul and Korean food.

About 200 people packed the Greater New Unity Baptist Church on the 8800 block of Avalon Boulevard. The forum was organized by the Black-Korean Alliance, a coalition of leaders from both communities.

The forum took place four weeks after Korean grocer Soon Ja Du shot Harlins, a 15-year-old black girl, in a dispute over a bottle of orange juice.

People heard little at the forum that hadn't been said before. But

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KT photo by Peter Park

Meeting

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African Americans and Korean Americans alike cheered and applauded when speakers emphasized the need for better understanding between the two groups.

The BKA called the forum to hear customers and merchants share their experiences and to start talking about plans to improve ties between blacks and Koreans. There would be no quick fix, co-chair Leo Terrell said.

"We can't solve the problems tonight. We didn't come to solve the problems tonight," Terrell said.

Members of the Brotherhood Crusade, a coalition of black grassroots community groups that vowed to shut down "disrespectful" Korean stores, also attended. But they stormed out because they said it would accomplish nothing.

"We are merely asking for the dignity we demand from each other, and we're going to demand it of you," said Danny Bakewell, president of the Brotherhood Crusade.

Black residents repeated oft-heard complaints about some Korean merchants: They treat customers rudely, set high prices and don't hire local residents and get involved in the community.

Yang Il Kim, president of the national Korean American Grocers Association, responded that many Korean businesses cannot afford to hire anybody. A black mortgage banker said merchants set high prices to pay off big business loans.

KAGRO also will tell merchants to show common courtesy to customers, Kim also said. Rev. Huey P. Rachal, pastor of Greater New Unity Baptist Church, also cited examples of Korean merchants who have taken part in the local community.

Rachal and other black speakers also criticized some African American leaders who claim to speak for the community and who seek to pit it against Koreans.

The BKA is scheduled to hold a second community forum on April 23.

Peter Park contributed to this story.



Town meeting

Above, A Korean grocer responds to claims that Koreans don't participate in community events by offering a **black teenager** an opportunity to join a basketball team he sponsors.

Left, At the close of the forum, **the crowd** holds hands in prayer for Latasha Harlins.

KT photos by Jung Suk Kim and Peter Park