

# Never again

By **K.W. Lee**  
Editor

*"We'll survive. That's been pretty much the backbone of Korean people. Whether it's in South Central or wherever, Koreans will survive." — Steve Lee, 24, riot victim*

After four days of torching, looting, killing and madness, much of Koreatown has lain in ruins. So have the immigrants' American dreams.

But Steve Lee, whose beauty supplies store lost \$150,000 to looters, said it all.

These new Americans from Korea will endure—like weeds sprouting from cracks in the scorching asphalt highway.

Not since the end of World War II, a minority's minority—voiceless and powerless—has been singled out for destruction by a politically powerful, but

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economically frustrated minority.

To Korean newcomers, it is a sobering reminder that they have replaced their Jewish counterparts as a scapegoat for all the ills, imagined or real, of the impoverished, crime ravaged black districts.

As Los Angeles burned, these urban warriors stood alone:

- Police weren't there in the crucial early hours of the riot.

- Neither did the National Guard arrive in time.

- Political leaders—including President Bush—were out of touch with the turmoil. They came and acted too late.

The mainstream media's ignorance and sensationalism in black-Korean coverage has had a life-threatening impact on many fearful Koreans, contributing to the Lebanonization of the city of Angels, polarizing the two misunderstood groups, rather than healing and calming tensions.

At the height of media hysteria, college student, Soon Hyun Lim, wrote to the *Los Angeles Times*:

"I feel for my father's safety and well-being because of the way that the media have perpetuated the problem existing in South Central L.A.

"My father is a Korean American merchant in South Central L.A., and as his son, I fear for his life every day."

Long before the Latasha Harlins tragedy, dozens of small store keepers were murdered, and hundreds of others were robbed and terrorized by gang members and criminals. Shoplifting and racial threats and harassments are part of the daily life of almost every Korean American merchant in inner cities.

As the Kafkaesque scene has unfolded, a rosy vision of a multiethnic city has degenerated into a foreboding future of a warring Lebanon, with contending groups tearing each other apart.

Another L.A. pattern is emerging: Racism has come to wear a different garb called nativism, with an anti-foreigner, anti-immigrant undercurrent.

Ironically, it is a growing number of African American opinion leaders—politicians, preachers and activists—who voice this new form of racism in symbiotic alliance with the guilt-ridden, white media. In their selective outrage,

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these so-called leaders have chosen to ignore the fact that killings, robberies, fire bombings, burglaries, gang terror, shopliftings and racial threats afflict these frightened merchants routinely.

These immediate tasks face us:

- Demand the prompt investigation in alleged civil rights violations involving Korean American merchants in the riot and elsewhere.

- Mobilize the best available resources such as lawyers, physicians, engineers, scientists and professors to help rebuild thousands of riot victims.

- Build a national network for emergency relief to help build the shattered lives of these survivors.

- Dispatch a delegation to Seoul to obtain necessary aid for the victimized.

- Form a national Korean American anti-defamation league to help combat bigotry, hatred and ignorance in the mainstream media.

- Convene a national meeting of dedicated community leaders and activists to discuss short- and long-range strategies in dealing with governments, African American and Hispanics and other Asian groups.