

Out of ashes, solidarity

30,000 KAs march for peace through K-town

By **Brenda Palk Sunoo**
Korea Times.

Under a blazing sun, college student Helen Kim cried out: "Where were the police when the Korean businesses were being looted?"

Kim, whose family store was hit by rioters, was part of the sea of 30,000 countrymen flooding the burned streets of Koreatown on May 2.

Meeting at Ardmore Park in Koreatown, the demonstrators blamed political officials and the Los Angeles Police Department for the recent four-day riot. Violence erupted on April 29 after four white policemen were acquitted of beating an African American.

With emotionally charged voices, they called for peace, justice for Rodney King and vowed to rebuild the ravaged portions of Koreatown and other commercial areas hit by arsonists and looters.

"We feel a sense of abandonment," said Kim, 25, a Tufts University student, who was on semester break at the time of the riots.

Kim joined the unified crowd of first- and second-generation Koreans who marched along Olympic Boulevard, Western Avenue, 3rd Street and Vermont Avenue. The demonstration was led by friends and relatives of Edward Lee, an 18-year-old Koreatown



A sea of 30,000 KAs and supporters march down Vermont Avenue in Koreatown on May 2.

resident who was shot to death on April 30 during a gunbattle involving police and two groups of Koreans who mistook the other for looters.

"Why are Korean Americans the fallguys for all social injustice?" read one sign.

Others also expressed the outrage, anger and shock at the city's worst incident of urban violence: "The blame lies with the U.S. government"; "Where is the justice of America"; "Media,

Report the tragedy of Koreatown"; and "Stop making us scapegoats."

With pickets and brooms, the marchers chanted for peace while some stopped along the way to sweep up the debris from the previous three days of rioting. Upon seeing the crowd pass by his restaurant, one Korean merchant ran outside and passed out cups of cold water and soft drinks. His wife followed behind, offering rice wrapped in seaweed to whoever put out their hands first.

As the demonstrators shouted, "We want peace," Thomas Kim and Leon Irvin wrapped their arms around each other's shoulders in solidarity. Both young men ran along the side of the march on Third Street—Irvin, an African American, held a Korean flag and Kim clutched the red, white and blue.

"I saw what happened to Koreans (on TV) and came here to help," Irvin

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1,867 KA store owners suffer heaviest toll

Damages estimated at \$347 million

By **Dexter H. Kim**
Korea Times

At least 1,867 Korean-owned businesses were reported burned or looted during the worst riots in Los Angeles history, according to Radio Korea.

That amounts to more than half of the approximately 3,100 businesses in Los Angeles damaged during the four days of vandalism, looting and arson that followed the verdict in the Rodney King beating case.

The losses for Korean-owned businesses were estimated at \$347 million, according to the Korean media.

Almost every sector of the Korean American business community in Los Angeles suffered directly or indirectly from the devastation.

Those most affected include:

• **Grocery stores:** Grocery stores were the hardest hit among Korean-owned businesses; 273 stores looted or burned and more than \$66 million in

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Rally

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said.

Kim, 23, a senior at Occidental College, said one of his friends phoned him about the march and rally. "We came from all walks of life."

The presence of African American supporters added a sense of solidarity between the two communities.

Angie Ahn, 22, said she welcomed "her brothers and sisters" who walked beside her. Ahn said her family owned a grocery store in South Central that had been vandalized.

"It (the riots) started (after) the Rodney King trial and somehow it was corroded and turned into a Korean and Afro-American thing, but it's not," she said.

Ronald Wilcox, a 28-year-old African American, said the conflict between Koreans and blacks were being fueled by "white America blowing out of proportion" incidents like the Latasha Harlins case.

Ten years ago, a community service program gave Glenn Lainfiesta the opportunity to join a taekwondo program. The 19-year-old marcher participated with his classmates.

Many of the Korean American demonstrators live in Koreatown, but many had come from outlying areas such as San Diego, Laguna Niguel, Santa Monica and the South Bay.

Organized by the Korean Emergency Response Task Force, thousands responded to an appeal broadcasted on *Radio Korea*. Announcers had urged the community to attend the rally in Ardmore Park to heal the wounds and join hands in rebuilding Koreatown.

Sitting on the grass, the crowd packed the entire recreation area as they listened to speeches delivered by several Korean community leaders, students, Korean marine veterans, a poet and actor Edward James Olmos.

Attorney T.S. Chung read a statement prepared by the organizers. "It's a difficult time for all. Since Wednesday, Korean Americans have suffered losses and we are frustrated by the inadequate response from the LAPD, the National Guard, the media and local government. Restore law and order. This is our city," he said.

Chung told the crowd that as of that Saturday, 860 Korean-owned businesses had been looted and/or burned. Damages were estimated at \$200 million, with about 46 personal injuries reported by the Korean media.

"We begin today to clean up our streets and ravaged



Photo by Jan Sunoo

Leon Irvin, left, and **Thomas Kim** wave flags at May 2 march through Koreatown.

buildings," he said.

Sun Kwon, vice president of the Korean Writers Association of American read a poem he had written during the siege. And one Korean who had organized the youth patrols cried at the podium as he described in Korean the terror his community had felt over the last few days.

Clearly, most of the rally and march participants were Korean Americans. But Nettie Smith, another African American resident of Koreatown, said she attended because "we have to stick together as one people."

Smith, a cocktail waitress at the Red Onion on Wilshire Boulevard and Kingsley Street, said she has lived in the neighborhood for three years. Most of the nearby Korean merchants, she added, know her by name. They treat her nicely, so she could not remain bitter even though she felt grocer Soon Ja Du deserved harsher punishment for killing 15-year-old Latasha Harlins in March 1991, she said.

"I am black. I know shooting is wrong," said Smith. "But in a tragedy situation, you lose control. It could happen to anyone."

Alice Yang Murray and **Angle Young** contributed to this report.