

LOS ANGELES AS VIEWED FROM KOREA

By Robert Kyser

The Social Contract asked Thom Duvernay, who currently works in Korea, to send us copies of the English language *Korea Times*' coverage of the riots in Los Angeles. Most of the articles detailed the disturbance (triggered by the acquittal of police officers accused of beating motorist Rodney King) as reported by Reuters News Service. Additional stories came from such sources as reports to the Korean Foreign Ministry from their ambassador in Washington and from their consulate in Los Angeles. In Washington, the Korean ambassador urged the U.S. government to help protect the lives and property of Korean Americans but also urged that the area where Korean shopkeepers were targeted for looting and burning be part of a redevelopment district. There was some concern expressed that the rebuilding of the area, to be headed by Peter Uberroth, would undercut Korean shopkeepers in favor of larger chain stores being located there.

Editorial comment on Saturday, May 2nd described Koreans in Los Angeles as being in an unfortunate position between the white majority and the justifiable anger of blacks. The timing of the incident was unfortunate since a Korean store-owner had just been given probation for the shooting death of a black girl the Korean had accused of shoplifting. After lauding America's history as "the land of opportunity" and "the land of immigrants" which has "most successfully built and operated a democratic political system" the editorial acknowledges that "wicked part of human nature" which can foster hate and discrimination based on skin color.

In reading such material, one becomes aware of how much the world looks to the United States as a leader in experiments to create a society which successfully absorbs persons from various races and cultures. While willing to grant that the conditions among blacks in America's cities are worsened by economic and social conditions, especially high unemployment, the editors of the *Korea Times* fault the failure of white U.S. citizens, both politically and individually, to repent of their mistreatment of blacks. But they also had advice for Korean-Americans who "must realize that they are living in a country with a multi-racial composition and cannot live alone. This means Koreans have to learn to develop good working relationships with other races, particularly blacks. ...In this respect the ghettoizing of Koreatown ... may not have been a good idea," they wrote.

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onto their already intense ethnocentrism white America's worst stereotypes and prejudices toward blacks."

The paper published an essay by a young Korean studying in the U.S. for his doctoral degree in history deploring the failure of Korean-Americans to protest the actions of the Korean shop-owner who killed the black customer, and admonishing his fellow countrymen that Koreans in the United States "need to admit that they have grafted onto their already intense ethnocentrism white America's worst stereotypes and prejudices toward blacks." He went on to suggest that whites open doors to reform, that blacks look to themselves for self-development, and that Koreans become better neighbors to their customers and citizens of their communities.

Other news stories from Seoul indicate that large amounts of aid are on their way to Koreans who are without income in Los Angeles, and that there may well be small business loans from Korean banks. There was even a comment here and there that ROK troops should be sent to L.A. to protect the lives and property of Korean citizens.

Mr. Duvernay says that during the riots, all attention was focused on Los Angeles. "Many envisioned the whole country on fire," he writes. "I pointed out to them that the same distortion happens concerning student demonstrations in Korea being viewed by the outside world." ■

[Notice the Oliphant cartoon that the Korean newspaper chose to use during their coverage of the Los Angeles riots — facing page.]