“It’s Not All Black and White”: The 1992 L.A. Riots, Interminority Race Relations, and Minority Press Response

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Contents

Abstract

This thesis conducts content analyses of three separate media channels' coverage of interminority race relations during the 1992 Los Angeles riots: mainstream broadcast news, the Black minority press, and the English edition of a Korean-language newspaper. Such research indicates that mainstream news outlets conformed to the "Black-Korean conflict" news frame and presented sympathetic yet alienating coverage of Korean American subjects in order to relatively valorize them, juxtaposed by unsympathetic, dangerously "deviant" characterizations of Black American rioters. Minority press, then, serves as an affective racial counterpublic to both rebuff certain normalized assumptions contained in mainstream coverage, while naturalizing and accepting others. The Black press works to more overtly critique instruments of power and systems of oppression that contradict the myth of the American Dream, but reinforces conceptions of the Black-white binary and diametric opposition between the Korean and Black communities. Korean-language media aimed at transitional- and second-generation Korean Americans, then, both challenge broader institutions *and* explicitly oppose the "Black-Korean conflict" framing device, promoting a shared sense of Korean American identity in the process. This thesis not only argues that these forums for dialogue each reflect the subjectivities and prejudices of its producers and consumers, but also examines how the resonances of such discourses still hold weight in the modern day.

Keywords

1992 L.A. riots, news media, ethnic media, minority press, Black-Korean conflict, interminority racism, racial triangulation, news framing

Acknowledgments

This thesis is the culmination of many hours spent exploring a longstanding interest of mine: race, its social and political constructions, its media representations, and the ways in which it has informed my — and many others' — identity. But, of course, my work is only one small part of who I am and who I have become. I want to thank those in my life who have watched and helped me grow, as a researcher and as a person, and whom I hold in the highest regard.

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Introduction: "A City in Crisis"

Figure 1. Korean Americans and other residents of Los Angeles gather in Koreatown on May 2, 1992. (Photograph by David Longstreath/AP).[1]

Picture this: the year is 1992, and Los Angeles (L.A.) is on fire. On May 2nd, devastated by the ruins of their livelihoods, laying in tattered pieces all around them, a crowd of 30,000 marchers, many of whom are Korean American, parades through the streets in support of small business owners and merchants. Sporting white headbands of mourning, some equipped with brooms and garbage bags to sweep up debris, the demonstrators are at once solemn and fraught with emotion. Onlookers cross self-imposed racial lines to shake hands; participants exchange words of comfort and tears; calls for peace echo across the masses gathered in a show of unity against the violence that has swept over their community.

Yet the *Los Angeles Times* article covering the event, published the day after the peaceful march and entitled "A CITY IN CRISIS," speaks mainly of disappointment over the "few blacks

[1] David Longstreath, Koreatown March, May 2, 1992, photograph, *Associated Press*, Los Angeles, https://www.npr.org/2012/04/27/151524921/how-koreatown-rose-from-the-ashes-of-l-a-riots.

in the crowd."[2] Attention is directed away from efforts towards collective action and is instead focused on depicting the riots as a reflection of resentment held by Black residents towards the success of Korean American businesses in poor minority neighborhoods. "This was an ideal opportunity," the piece reads, "to have some kind of rapprochement between the black and Korean communities."[3]

Following the verdicts of four police officers involved in the beating of Rodney King, the 1992 L.A. uprising was defined by a series of riots in April and May that were highly publicized by mainstream news media sources. National broadcast journalism's coverage of the riots, featuring cases of looting, arson, and destruction of property, worked to frame the relationship between the Korean American and Black American communities — and, more broadly, between Asian Americans and other racial minorities — as one defined by interminority tension and racial animosity, carrying with it longstanding implications for the ways in which Asian American political activism and coalition-building has been complicated by predominant ideologies surrounding race. These dominant ideologies cement and privilege, if not white supremacy, then most certainly a white *primacy*: a prioritization of whiteness and an orienting of other racial discourses around this central conception. Exploring the exact nature of this coverage requires an in-depth analysis of texts and journalistic discourse from the time period of the L.A. riots. This will rely on texts produced by major news networks like NBC News and CNN — but also from minority press outlets like the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and the *Korea Times*, which serve to present how affected communities were perceiving the riots themselves and how they were

[2] Irene Chang and Greg Krikorian, "A City in Crisis: 30,000 Show Support in Koreatown March: Demonstration: Various Ethnic Groups Gather. They Call for Peace: 'We Want No More Fighting,'" *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 1992, www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-05-03-mn-1945-story.html.
[3] Chang and Krikorian, "A City in Crisis."

working to negotiate and even counter narratives that reaffirm and perpetuate existing systems of power and hierarchy.

In the last half century, Asian Americans have been both praised for their "hard work" and "natural aptitude" while also being Othered — cast as separate, and therefore lesser, than the established norm.[4] These characterizations contribute to the idea that, try as they might, Asians and Asian Americans can never truly be acknowledged or recognized as white in spite of their seemingly successful strides in upward social mobility. The Model Minority Myth, which a scoping review of 97 empirical studies identified as "representing successful assimilation into a white dominant society" and a confirmation of the American Dream, only further cements a racial hierarchy that pits the triumphs of Asian Americans against the supposed failings of other minority groups.[5] This rhetoric, in turn, frames racial minorities as diametrically opposed: what benefits one group necessitates detriment to the other(s). This is, of course, a fiction. Yet anti-Black prejudice does shape Asian American public opinion, manifested through political attitudes and beyond.[6] To examine existing relations between racial minority groups that have been presumed to operate in this manner means to ultimately question the effects of publicizing and spotlighting perceptions of racial communities rooted in anti-Blackness and conformity to white primacy. Korean Americans and Black Americans in the L.A. area had any internal hostilities possessed towards one another suddenly be made hyper-visible to those outside that particular sphere. In combination with the mainstream neglect of other factors that contributed to the outburst of rioting and violence that occurred following the Rodney King verdict, it becomes clear that mainstream broadcast news sources, in speaking to and for white normative audiences,

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[4] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).
[5] Jessica Walton and Mandy Truong, "A Review of the Model Minority Myth: Understanding the Social, Educational and Health Impacts," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 46, no. 3 (Sep 2016): 391–419.
[6] Matthew Tokeshi, "Anti-Black Prejudice in Asian American Public Opinion," *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 11, no. 2 (2023): 366–89.

identified with Korean American subjects and cast them in a sympathetic light so as to frame them as the victims of Black aggressors, regarded as immoral and irrational actors. For instance, images of armed Korean American shopkeepers defending their stores from Black looters, known as "Roof Koreans" or "Rooftop Koreans," rooted themselves in the American consciousness as emblematic of an epidemic of hostility between these two groups.

Yet white sympathy for Korean American subjects during the riots should not be mistaken as mainstream media conflating the identities of Asian Americans and whites. Reliance on other means of amplifying difference makes efforts to construct networks of solidarity especially pertinent, given the unique positioning that the Asian American community has occupied: both civically ostracized and relatively valorized.[7] These inherent contradictions speak to the ambiguities of collective racial ideologies — to be simultaneously read as yellow peril and model minority, to be both lambasted as invaders and celebrated as inheritors of the American Dream. The Black and Korean-language press, then, become a platform where racial resentments harbored by both communities are both paradoxically amplified and extinguished; rather than propagating a singular, unified message, these outlets went beyond spreading awareness of the riots and served as a forum for internalized discourse, offering a place for Korean and Black Americans to make sense of the senseless violence.

This thesis explores mainstream and minority representations of interminority race relations during the 1992 L.A. riots, specifically Korean American and Black American perceptions of one another. How did national broadcast journalism frame relations between the Korean and Black communities in and around the 1992 L.A. riots, beginning with the killing of Latasha Harlins in March of 1991 and culminating in outcry against the riots themselves? How do responses from Black and Korean-language press outlets mediate between these readings of

[7] Claire Jean Kim, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans," *Politics & Society* 27, no. 1 (1999): 105–38.

the riots and the affective consequences on these communities? Is there something to be said for the underreported and ignored instances of interminority support and cooperation? And if so, what does this suggest for the recontextualizing of our shared understanding of the riots and their aftermath?

Frame Theory in News Media

When examining how mainstream media's coverage of certain events over others influences the perceived salience of such events, it is first necessary to define the parameters of *frame theory*, a term used when referring to communicative processes that implicitly shape a viewer's understanding of a given issue.[8] A short essay entitled "Newspapers" by renowned twentieth-century journalist Walter Lippmann perhaps says it best when he characterizes news media as less of a mirror and more of a flashlight. Rather than imbuing the audience with a complete picture of the political scene, he argues, newspapers provide a highly selective series of glimpses.[9] Journalistic objectivity is incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to attain, as all journalistic endeavors require practices of presence and absence — deciding what should and should not be included in news coverage — that are inherently subjective in nature, given that journalists are active rather than passive participants in the production and distribution of such media.

It has been noted that frames within communication are placed in several locations at once; these include the text, the communicator, the recipient, and the culture.[10] These complementary components allow for a dynamic process of framing made up of distinct parts:

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[8] Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).
[9] Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (Harcourt Brace, 1922).
[10] Robert Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): 51–58.

frame-building and frame-setting.[11] *Frame-building* is best defined as the infrastructural elements that inform the development of news frames, oftentimes referring to qualities possessed by journalists and news recipients, as well as broader social and political movements outside of the newsroom.[12] *Frame-setting*, alternatively, is how media frames interact with media consumers' predispositions. Together, these pieces work in tandem to affect audience interpretations of events covered in news media, and by extension push narratives that impact public opinion.

Media frames — central organizing ideas that call attention to certain aspects of a narrative over others — have the unintended consequence of exacerbating sensationalism and spectacle, which may further distort the objectivity of such reports.[13] I argue that the tendency to build a news story around a key concept, rather than listing the facts independently of one another, stems from a desire for cohesion — or perhaps even a satisfying emotional appeal — and is one uniquely enabled by the technological affordances of national broadcast news networks that seek, above all else, *profit*: a way of building interest and sustaining viewership. Though primarily discussed in the context of political campaigns and elections, this logic can be extended to include research on more general news broadcasting, as seen with the narrative of Korean Americans versus Black Americans in coverage of the L.A. riots. While framing is undoubtedly a helpful tool journalists can employ to interpret and explain events, problems, and issues, I concur with the general concern possessed by researchers of news media that media framing has the power to naturalize ways of thinking that fit the status quo, consequently

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[11] Pamela J. Shoemaker and Stephen D. Reese, *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influence on Mass Media Content* (White Plains, NY: Longman, 1996); Paul d'Angelo, "News Framing as a Multiparadigmatic Research Program: A Response to Entman," *Journal of Communication* 52, no. 4 (2002): 870–888; Dietram A, Scheufele, "Agenda-setting, Priming, and Framing Revisited: Another Look at Cognitive Effects of Political Communication," *Mass Communication & Society* 3, no. 2-3 (2000): 297–316.
[12] Herbert J. Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2, no. 1 (1979): 1–20; Gaye Tuchman, "The News Net," *Social Research* (1978): 253–276.
[13] Marjorie Randon Hershey, "The Campaign and the Media" in *The Election of 2000*, ed., Gerald M. Pomper (CQ Press, 2001).

discouraging change or evaluation of pervasive cultural or infrastructural problems that can be mitigated or solved.[14]

But profit is, of course, only one explanation for why news outlets, especially through mainstream avenues, privilege the news they do. Herbert Gans, in researching the professional standards and external pressures that shape newsroom priorities, writes that journalists are tasked with "[creating] 'stories' about what they have observed or whom they have interviewed" — a picture of America — and consequently categorizing people into the Knowns and the Unknowns.[15] Because news coverage abides by these principles and is informed by dominant, mainstream values, media actors unintentionally situate their work around deviance from the norm because "only departures from these ideals become news stories."[16]

Writing more specifically about the interplay between social and political protest movements and mass media in the 1960s, Todd Gitlin argues that movements and media "are not creatures of each other; they work on each other, but, as Marx said in another connection, not in conditions of their own making."[17] News media need stories, and the movements they cover need publicity to get their messaging off the ground and into the mainstream. It is thus perhaps most useful to think of news media as the culmination of logistical, economical, and ideological aims; news actors are not frequently co-opted by politicians, Gitlin notes, but these news actors are still subject to corporate deadlines. They are also, naturally, subject to the dynamics and discourses of power that determine what is deemed "newsworthy" and what is not.

In writing and speaking for the mainstream, large news media entities are implicitly encouraged to appeal towards "normal" audiences — audiences that are by and large assumed to

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[14] David Tewksbury and Dietram A. Scheufele, "News Framing Theory and Research" in *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research*, eds., Mary Beth Oliver, Arthur A. Raney, and Jennings Bryant (Routledge, 2019).
[15] Herbert J. Gans, *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time* (New York: Vitage Books, 1979), 5.
[16] Gans, *Deciding What's News*, xvii.
[17] Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching*, 24.

be white. This means that the framing of such coverage conforms and fits into racial narratives that uplift whiteness as what I call the *normative ideal*: the standard that all people are encouraged to strive for. An exploration of minority press outlets, specifically from Black newspapers and Korean-language newspapers, would subvert and challenge such coverage because they are not geared towards the presumption of a white reader; instead, they aim to speak to minority audiences that possess more of a shared frame of reference.

Asian Americans in the Social Hierarchy and Racial Triangulation

How then, the question arises, does representation of racial minority groups, with special attention to Asian Americans, play into this? How are Asian Americans depicted not only in news media, but more broadly through perpetuations of dominant racial ideologies? The question of racial triangulation — that is, the process by which minority group B affiliates itself with dominant group A in order to differentiate itself from minority group C — is imperative when considering the nebulous identity markers given to Asian Americans in the public consciousness. Asian Americans, as argued by Claire Jean Kim, are a subordinate group that is valorized by white society relative to Black Americans; this is done to further dominate both, but especially the latter. Coupled with the characterization of Asians as forever foreigners and unassimilable with whites, racially triangulated discourses ostracize and exclude Asian Americans from political and civic membership in U.S. society to prevent them from being regarded as equals.[18] Yellow peril and forever foreigner stereotypes inform the narrative of exploitation and invasion used to Other Asian Americans and cast them as unwelcome and uninvited in the U.S. by the majority.[19] They posit that Asians pose an existential threat to the American way of life and are

[18] Kim, "Racial Triangulation."
[19] Erika Lee, "The 'Yellow Peril' and Asian Exclusion in the Americas," *Pacific Historical Review* 76, no. 4 (2007): 537–62.

inherently incompatible with American ideals. On the other hand, framing Asians as model minorities is used as a racial wedge to divide minority groups in accordance with the principles of racial triangulation. The theoretical implications of such stereotypes provide insight into the discursive work media actors undergo when they engage in racialized rhetoric. Asian Americans who buy into the narrative of climbing up the social ladder thus appeal to notions of whiteness, which is continually encouraged by dominant white society's reliance on the Model Minority Myth and other racialized perceptions of Asian Americans. Not only does this catch Asian Americans in a rhetorical middle, but it also freezes the definitions of "Blackness" and "whiteness," suggesting that these are inflexible identity markers. In reality, race has never remained a constant in human history, and these markers are perhaps better understood as fluid and subject to revaluation and recategorization over time.

Done at the expense of racial minorities that are deemed to fall below the standard "set" by Asian Americans, especially Latino and Black communities, racial triangulation serves to generate resentment between racial minority groups when naturalized in societal infrastructures. Benedict Anderson writes about nations as socially constructed entities. He defines them as a way for individuals to build a sense of community through an individualistic process of conceptualizing points of connection between them and others from a shared place of origin.[20] This mental image of affinity can, in turn, justify animosities harbored towards out-groups. Applying this logic to the identities of marginalized groups, namely on the basis of race, can provide an explanation as to the existence of interminority racism as disadvantaged racial groups compete with one another for necessary resources. This is especially relevant given the economic context of the 1992 L.A. riots, which were concentrated in locations of relative poverty with high

[20] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso Books, 1983).

levels of racial diversity, promoting a tribalistic "us versus them" mentality. This image of the nation, then, works to knit Korean Americans together as a unified group under threat of attack by rioting Others — made all the more prominent through an adherence to the fundamental principles and accepted naturalization of the American Dream.

It cannot be overstated the valuable role that community organizations play in unifying racial groups located in diverse and multiracial areas. Community organizations, especially those oriented around Asian Americans and similar immigrant constituencies, have taken on what has traditionally been the role of political parties, which have failed to engage and mobilize Asian American groups.[21] These civic institutions help Asian Americans learn about the political system and participate within it, suggesting that they rely on experiences within local communities for their socialization rather than direct recruitment by political parties. This strengthens the formation of bonds within racially oriented communities and gives them a shared sense of purpose and direction, even and often especially in times of turmoil and trauma.[22] To better understand how Asian Americans make sense of their own situation through an imagined panethnic identity, Asian American perspectives will be immensely more valuable than ones from non-Asian creators.[23] Authentic histories, stories, and writings are imperative in this pursuit.

The 1992 Los Angeles Riots and Tensions Preceding Them

In early March of 1991, Black motorist Rodney King was brutally beaten by officers of the Los Angeles Police Department during his arrest after a high-speed pursuit for driving while

[21] Janelle Wong, *Democracy's Promise* (University of Michigan Press, 2006).
[22] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994).
[23] Dina Okamoto and G. Cristina Mora, "Panethnicity," *Annual Review of Sociology* 40 (2014): 219–39.

intoxicated. This attack, which was recorded and made public for all to see, sparked further outrage when three of the four policemen charged with use of excessive force were acquitted, and the jury failed to reach a verdict for the fourth.[24] This outcome in late April of 1992 ignited what is now known as the 1992 L.A. riots, culminating in dozens dead, thousands injured, and extensive property damage.

Of the small businesses and other locations looted and ransacked during the riots, a sizable number of them were owned by Korean Americans, who had largely set up shop in poorer neighborhoods near Black residential areas; nearly $400 million in damages were accrued over the course of a single week.[25] What heightened anxieties and periods of intense fear and mourning for the Korean American community, both in Southern L.A. and beyond, was the lack of aid and protection from law enforcement during the rioting — mostly due to language barriers and the low social status of the Asian American business owners left most vulnerable. A commonly shared sentiment among the unified Korean American community was that they "left us to burn."[26]

Major news outlets played up the interminority tensions that had existed between the Korean and Black American communities in the South-Central L.A. area, brought to attention with the killing of Latasha Harlins in March of 1991. Harlins, a Black American girl, was fatally shot at the age of 15 by Soon Ja Du, a 49-year-old Korean American convenience store owner, after an altercation over alleged shoplifting. Du, who was sentenced to 10 years in state prison, had her sentence suspended and was instead placed on probation with community service.[27] The

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[24] Rodney King and Lawrence J. Spagnola, *The Riot Within: My Journey from Rebellion to Redemption: Learning How We Can All Get Along* (New York: Harperone, 2012).
[25] Nancy Abelmann and John Lie, *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots* (Harvard University Press, 1995).
[26] Kyung Lah, "The LA Riots were a Rude Awakening for Korean-Americans," *CNN*, April 28, 2017, https://www.cnn.com/2017/04/28/us/la-riots-korean-americans/index.html.
[27] Brenda Stevenson, *The Contested Murder of Latasha Harlins: Justice, Gender, and the Origins of the LA Riots* (OUP USA, 2013).

failed appeal of Du's sentencing was reported by journalists belonging to and affiliated with mainstream news media as a contributing factor towards the targeting of Korean American stores during the riots.[28] Framed as a clash between these two racial minority groups, larger contextual factors were overwhelmingly ignored in favor of stories centered around this Black-Korean throughline. "Mainstream news-cycle broadcasting," Wendy Sung writes, "crafted a hyper-visible and lasting narrative of Korean-Black racial conflict that persists in the public imaginary."[29]

The history of L.A. is one marked by rich protest movements, rising to prominence first in the 1960s and then expanding into the present day. Davis and Wiener argue that rather than the narrative promoted through institutions like Hollywood show business, it was boots on the ground — predominantly young people of color — who instigated egalitarian and progressive change.[30] From this political climate fostered in large part by racial minority groups in L.A. comes the understanding that Black Americans rioted in 1992 not merely as a way of expressing outrage and discontent with the ways in which they had been treated by police and other members of L.A., but also following a tradition that had begun long before events like the killing of Latasha Harlins and the beating of Rodney King — whether intentionally or otherwise. The riots, then, should not be conceptualized as an imaginary race war between Korean American shopkeepers and Black American rioters, but as the consequence of a multitude of factors: systemic police violence against communities of color, corporate disinvestment in Southern L.A., and a long history of structural racial and class-based inequality.[31] Nor should the riots be interpreted as solely a reactionary outburst from Black Americans; rather, the 1992 L.A. riots

[28] Soo-Kwang Oh and Justin Hudson, "Framing and Reframing the 1992 LA Riots: A Study of Minority Issues Framing by the Los Angeles Times and its Readers," *Revista de Comunicación* 16, no. 2 (2017): 123–146.
[29] Wendy Sung, "David Choe's 'KOREANS GONE BAD'" in *Global Asian American Popular Cultures*, eds., Shilpa Davé, Leilani Nishime, and Tasha G. Oren (New York University Press, 2016), 92.
[30] Mike Davis and Jon Wiener, *Set the Night on Fire: L.A. in the Sixties* (Verso Books, 2021).
[31] Sung, "David Choe's 'KOREANS GONE BAD.'"

were "multicultural" in that white, Black, Latino, and Asian people all participated and engaged in the riots in similar ways.

American cultural studies scholar John Fiske explores the distinctions we draw between reality and events as portrayed in media through a series of cases that all involve the voices and perceptions of minority groups, as well as the myths brought on by dominant society that were both challenged and perpetuated through political coverage. Importantly, the way in which news media covered and framed the rioting that followed the acquittal of Rodney King's attackers did not include discussion of the intervention and attempts at reconciliation from leaders of both communities.[32] Existing literature conducting research on the 1992 L.A. riots expands on race's effect on how events were depicted by mainstream broadcast journalism. Such scholarship finds that viewers were influenced by "raced ways of thinking" — meaning that the implicit decisions made by media actors, as well as the narratives surrounding race in the U.S., pushed audiences to interpret the L.A. riots as a race-based problem as opposed to one exacerbated by declining economic conditions and systemic racism.[33] Reception experience — and how media audiences respond to coverage — accordingly contains implications for how race can shape the reproduction of racial subjectivities.[34]

How national news media frames the experiences of racial minorities underscores the necessity for minority press, which are afforded the unique opportunity to spotlight perspectives otherwise ignored or silenced by mainstream voices, and thus provide a means through which affected communities can reconcile their own interpretations of broader issues with outsider perceptions. The place-bound nature of minority news outlets, racial stratification of the public

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[32] John Fiske, *Media Matters: Race and Gender in U.S. Politics* (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 1996).
[33] Fiske, *Media Matters*; Darnell M. Hunt, *Screening the Los Angeles "Riots": Race, Seeing, and Resistance* (Cambridge University Press, 1997); Sung, "David Choe's 'KOREANS GONE BAD.'"
[34] Hunt, *Screening the Los Angeles "Riots."*

sphere, and the growth of tragic discourse as the dominant cultural form for discussing race have all contributed to the relative invisibility of the Black press, alongside other forms of minority press — in this case, Asian American press sources.[35] As coverage of the 1992 L.A. riots denied Asian Americans a platform, these groups instead resorted to their own community-centered establishments to distribute information within their circles and thus negotiate dominant readings of the riots themselves.

It goes without saying that academic literature on the L.A. riots and race relations as depicted through the riots is extensive.[36] Indeed, much attention has been given to Black-Korean relations and the prejudices harbored by both groups during what was and still, to some extent, remains a time of great civil unrest.[37] I argue that research remains to be conducted, however, on the specific media channels utilized by the Korean and Black American communities — and the extent to which these media outlets, which were directed at the affected communities themselves rather than framed as a form of public outreach to the mainstream, exacerbated and/or challenged normative conceptions of the riots and of Black-Korean relations. There is a notable lack of studies that examine this mediated relationship, and the studies that do examine interminority discourse largely fail to incorporate the ways in which these media channels could have produced a sort of feedback loop, reinforcing damaging racial narratives and rebuffing others through an adherence to seemingly arbitrary standards. Seeing how media actors within these

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[35] Ronald N. Jacobs, *Race, Media, and the Crisis of Civil Society: From Watts to Rodney King* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[36] Moon H. Jo, "Korean Merchants in the Black Community: Prejudice Among the Victims of Prejudice," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 15, no. 3 (1992): 395–411; Alex J. Norman, "Managing Ethnic Conflict within a Community Context: Black Korean Relations in an American City," *Community Development Journal* 29, no. 2 (1994): 169–176.

[37] Lucie Cheng and Yen Espiritu, "Korean Businesses in Black and Hispanic Neighborhoods: A Study of Intergroup Relations," *Sociological Perspectives* 32, no. 4 (1989): 521–534; Kyeyoung Park, *LA Rising: Korean Relations with Blacks and Latinos After Civil Unrest* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019);

respective groups responded to the framing they were subjected to by mainstream sources may provide valuable insight into the implications this pivotal event has had on shaping media activism within these communities.

It would be remiss of me to not situate my work against the research conducted by Hemant Shah and Michael C. Thornton in their book *Newspaper Coverage of Interethnic Conflict*, in which they investigate coverage of the 1992 L.A. riots and recurring themes found within mainstream newspapers like the *Los Angeles Times*, Black newspapers across the nation like the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and the *Chicago Defender*, and Asian American newspapers like *KoreAm Journal* and *AsianWeek*.[38] I encountered Shah and Thornton's book during my literature review process, and many of my conclusions are aligned with theirs. My work functions in dialogue with their extensive scholarship by speaking to these publications' place in the larger cultural ecosystem. Much has changed in the media landscape since their book was released in 2004, and this thesis is an attempt to further interpret how these changes have influenced collective understandings of the 1992 L.A. riots, of subsequent social and political protest movements, and of the tenuous positionality of Asian American identity formation.

Outline

I have divided the remainder of the following thesis into three chapters, each aiming to evaluate news media coverage of the 1992 L.A. riots and its associated interminority race relations from a unique perspective. The first chapter will cover mainstream perceptions of Black-Korean relations in L.A. by examining national broadcast journalism, through archival footage sourced from the Vanderbilt Television News Archive. I intend to utilize coverage from

[38] Hemant Shah and Michael C. Thornton, *Newspaper Coverage of Interethnic Conflict: Competing Visions of America* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004).

the news networks ABC News, CBS News, NBC News, and CNN, which will approximate dominant readings of the riots themselves. The second chapter, then, will examine a selection of Black minority press outlets from across the nation, namely the *New York Amsterdam News*, the *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, and the *New Pittsburgh Courier*; these papers will be sourced from the digital archival database ProQuest Historical Black Newspapers, as provided through the University of Virginia Library. Lastly, the third chapter seeks to capture Korean American perspectives of the riots from the L.A. area by looking at Korean-language newspapers — meaning the English edition of the *Korea Times*, then and now the largest Korean-language newspaper in the United States and also based in L.A. itself. These chapters will seek to take a retrospective look at these papers and place them in their historical context, while the conclusion will situate them in the modern era and map the implications these negotiated readings of the L.A. riots have had on the state of interminority race relations, and more broadly minority activism, today.

In working so extensively with archival databases and collections of texts compiled by other academics, I attempt to strengthen my own research by approaching the works of others from a historiographical lens. This means challenging the assumed objectivity of "history" and the fallacy of conflating the historical record with the true past. Keith Jenkins, in his book *Re-thinking History*, writes that contrary to popular conceptions, "the past and history float free of each other," meaning they are not one and the same but rather refer to entirely different exercises — the latter being only our best approximation of the former, thus subjected to biases and problems inherent to frame theory.[39] Yet history theory, meaning theoretical discussions of history, is oftentimes not subject to the same attention or scrutiny as theory in other disciplines. Michel-Rolph Trouillot similarly argues that history is not recorded or preserved independently

[39] Keith Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 7.

of people; rather, as participants and narrators, people implicitly color history with subjectivities.[40] In theory, an archive is more inclusive than news media, as it is meant to hold inclusive material that a researcher can sort through with different criteria. Archival work, however, still makes intentional choices about what to include and what not to include. To remain vigilant in archival studies is to remain cognizant of such biases, especially those on the basis of contentious identity markers like race.

[40] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

Chapter 1: Are "Good Asians" White and "Bad Asians" Black?

Figure 2. Korean store owners during the riots. (Photograph by Hyungwon Kang/*Los Angeles Times*).[41]

If one stated goal of this thesis is to examine how minority press mediates between mainstream perceptions of the riots and their underlying causes, then it follows that one must first develop a general understanding of the mainstream — that is, how mass media fulfills its role as an instrument of perpetuating and normalizing existing narratives surrounding race and racial triangulation. This means fixating on the dominant images and ideologies forefronted by mainstream news outlets intended for white normative audiences, as well as how these have persisted in the cultural imaginary. By "cultural imaginary," I refer to the expansion of the imagined communities articulated by Benedict Anderson.[42] Omi and Winant go further, then, to propose that these socially constructed bonds lead to racial formation that permeates identities and institutions.[43] The imaginary is not only the socially constructed bonds believed to tie

[41] Hyungwon Kang, Korean Store Owners During the Riots, April 30, 1992, photograph, *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles.
[42] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.
[43] Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*.

individuals and entities together, but also the values and symbols upheld by social institutions that then reaffirm these ties.

The 1992 L.A. riots, I argue, became a point for the U.S. cultural imaginary, through depictions on mainstream broadcast news sources, to project its already taxonomic discourses surrounding race and power onto complex interminority relations between Korean and Black residents of South-Central L.A. and beyond. This is not to say that interminority and interethnic conflict did not exist between Black and Korean Americans in the L.A. area, or really in the U.S. more generally: it did. But the point of distinction here is that Black and Korean animosity does not exist in a vacuum, nor can it be used to explain away broader economic and infrastructural concerns that contributed to the rioting in 1992. Intentionally or not, the flattening of experiences and explanatory factors undertaken by mass media performance did little to further nuance the conversation; in fact, it actively worked in the opposite direction.

The American Dream and the "Black-Korean Conflict"

One simply cannot discuss racial triangulation and Asian American positionality without also discussing conceptions of the American Dream; the two are inextricably intertwined. But what does it mean to fully realize the American Dream? The term's definition is itself just as elusive as a path to achieve it. Whether referring to the accumulation of wealth and affluence, career prospects, or even just a sense of general prosperity — all speak vaguely to the feeling that one has "made it." Faith in the American Dream is contingent on hope for one's individual future, but also a steadfast belief that the system works, and that those willing to play by the rules have a fair chance at leading a happy and fulfilling life; naturally, such faith varies between

generations, as younger Americans are more likely to express skepticism towards the model.[44] Individuals are thus modeled as existing independently from their station of birth and entrenched class disparities: their ability to transcend such barriers, if only they work hard enough, is paramount here. Naturally, Asian Americans fit into the narrative of the American Dream as emblematic of the "model minority." They are, simply put, living proof that the American Dream is alive and well, reaffirming ideologies reliant on American exceptionalism.

When speaking of race in America, Asian Americans are, if anything, an afterthought. Discourses — vernacular and otherwise — that look at dominant racial ideologies in the U.S. tend to view race through a Black-white paradigm.[45] We see this in specific major and controversial cultural products released before and around the period of the riots. When a Korean shopkeeper and his wife are shot and killed in the 1993 film *Menace II Society*, for example, white and Black cultural commentators were included in interpretations and debates surrounding its significance, but "no one … asked Korean Americans what they thought."[46] This is a glaring lack of perspective considering the characters' deaths are in response to a snide remark made by the Korean cashier, who watches the shooter with suspicion and contempt, clearly invoking the nature of the Black-Korean conflict frame. Korean Americans have, even in the lingering aftermath of the riots, routinely been kept out of the conversation. By treating non-Black racial minorities as negligible, the experiences of such marginalized communities are minimized, and racial thought is subsequently simplified into a conversation between those deemed the majority and the minority.

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[44] Clara R. Riggio, "Defining the American Dream: A Generational Comparison," *Modern Psychological Studies* 27, no. 1 (2021).
[45] Juan F. Perea, "The Black/White Binary Paradigm of Race: The Normal Science of American Racial Thought," *La Raza LJ* 10 (1998): 127–172.
[46] Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, 154.

This binary is not only reductive: it is dangerous. It denies a platform for discussion of the intricacies of interminority relations, and the ways in which the mainstream pits groups against one another, co-opting the struggles and frustrations possessed by one racial minority when convenient to denigrate or negatively portray another. Exploring the mechanisms of racialization as a theoretical framework beyond the Black-white binary, then, means focusing specifically on how racialization feeds into media policy and ownership incentives, as well as how racialization structures an "ideal politics" oriented around a collective idea of hegemonic whiteness.[47]

Even when Asian Americans *are* included in discussions of racial thought, they are often conceptualized as "lesser whites" — minorities who can never be read as white, yet assume a position that approximates whiteness through the metric of material success.[48] Until 1992, and even after the riots, Korean American identity had been produced and sold to the mainstream by non-Koreans, either through adherence to the Model Minority stereotype, or through Black cultural products that characterized Korean Americans as "rude, linguistically limited foreigners who exploited the black community."[49] Some exceptions to this rule provide more nuanced understandings, of course; Spike Lee's 1989 film *Do the Right Thing*, for instance, explicitly addresses a Korean business owner in a Black community where few Black-owned businesses exist.[50] Though the Korean character Sonny is depicted in racially reductive terms, the film's logic implies that he "understands the political power relations that make blackness an inescapable construction" by acknowledging that he is not white, and is rather the same as the

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[47] Bianca Gonzalez-Sobrino and Devon R. Goss, "Exploring the Mechanisms of Racialization beyond the Black–White Binary," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42, no. 4 (2019): 505–10.
[48] Yao Li and Harvey L. Nicholson Jr., "When 'Model Minorities' Become 'Yellow Peril' - Othering and the Racialization of Asian Americans in the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Sociol Compass* 15, no. 2 (2021).
[49] Rose M. Kim, "Violence and Trauma as Constitutive Elements in Korean American Racial Identity Formation: The 1992 L.A. Riots/Insurrection/Saigu," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35, no. 11 (2012): 1999–2018.
[50] *Do the Right Thing*, directed by Spike Lee (Universal Pictures, 1989), 1:20:00.

angry Black crowd that has confronted him.[51] Yet this still speaks to just how prevalent the imagery of hostile Black-Korean relations was during this time. Ice Cube, in his 1991 song "Black Korea," raps at one point:

> "Look you little Chinese motherfucker / I ain't trying to steal none of yo' shit, leave me alone! … So pay respect to the Black fist / Or we'll burn your store, right down to a crisp / And then we'll see ya!"[52]

When Korean Americans are uplifted as model minorities — examples of the American Dream in action — and Black Americans are disregarded as failures due to a lack of work ethic (rather than broader institutional barriers), the conflict frame perpetuated by mainstream media channels is thus solidified. Retrospective examinations of the L.A. riots have agreed that the economic and political climate of South-Central L.A. during this time makes the riots far more than merely a reprise of the 1965 "race riots" in Watts.[53] Just as Scott Saul notes that the Watts riots were as much "a tale of class and generational fragmentation in the black community" as they were an outburst of civil arrest motivated by allegations of police brutality and abuse, the L.A. riots draw upon far more than the beating of Rodney King.[54] To understand underlying animosities harbored by Korean Americans and Black Americans against one another, readers must familiarize themselves with the politics of Black-Korean conflict more broadly, contained not only in L.A. but in other urban hubs like New York City — like with the Flatbush boycott, in which Black residents of Flatbush, Brooklyn boycotted, picketed, marched, and rallied against Korean-owned businesses after a physical altercation between a Korean-born store manager and

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[51] Philip Hanson, "The Politics of Inner City Identity in 'Do the Right Thing,'" *South Central Review* 20, no. 3 (2008): 47–66.
[52] Ice Cube, "Black Korea," track 15 on *Death Certificate*, Lench Mob Records and Priority Records, 1991.
[53] Scott Saul, "Gridlock of Rage: The Watts and Rodney King Riots," in *A Companion to Los Angeles*, eds., William Deverell and Greg Hise (John Wiley & Sons, 2014).
[54] Saul, "Gridlock of Rage," 153.

a Black shopper accused of shoplifting.[55] Korean business owners and shopkeepers, settling nearby predominantly Black neighborhoods, rarely interacted with the Black community outside of contexts where Korean Americans were sellers and Black Americans were buyers. Resisting and countering these framing devices, however, proves to be notably difficult when Black Americans are routinely denied a voice in mainstream coverage, and Korean Americans struggle to articulate such criticisms due to sizable language barriers. As stated by Lie and Abelmann, the widespread lack of English proficiency silenced Korean Americans and contributed to their "inability … to articulate their media criticisms and to advance alternative interpretations."[56]

Mainstream broadcast coverage opted to frame the 1992 L.A. riots as an interethnic conflict between Black Americans and Korean Americans, conveniently avoiding addressing infrastructural failings in the L.A. area that run counter to the ideals that the American Dream hinges upon. With the mainstream's attention directed towards the Black-Korean conflict, one can easily forget that it was not the Black-Korean conflict that sparked the riots, but instead outrage over the "not guilty" verdict of the Rodney King beating — Black American anger was targeted not explicitly at Korean American merchants, but at the white majority and a miscarriage of justice. Nor was it highlighted that the majority of people arrested for rioting and looting in 1992 were not Black Americans, but Latinos.[57] Mentioning declining economic conditions and a police department that had largely ignored cries for help from both of these racial communities would necessitate acknowledging that the system was and still is, to some extent, broken — something that dominant narratives are naturally disinclined to admit. Consequently, it became more enticing to focus on the killing of Latasha Harlins, a Black

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[55] Claire Jean Kim, *Bitter Fruit: The Politics of Black-Korean Conflict in New York City* (Yale University Press, 2000).
[56] Nancy Abelmann and John Lie, "The 1992 Los Angeles Riots and the 'Black-Korean Conflict," in *Koreans in the Hood: Conflict with African Americans*, ed., Kwang Chung Kim (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 79.
[57] Nancy Abelmann and John Lie, "1992 Los Angeles Riots," 80.

teenage girl who had been killed by Korean shop owner Soon Ja Du in a shop quarrel. The light sentence she received was thus seen to be the dominant source of Black American anger, without much sustained attention towards other potential sources of tension.[58] As the name "Latasha Harlins" became a stand-in for the Black-Korean conflict frame, it almost didn't matter whether or not Black and Korean residents of L.A. agreed with the conclusion drawn up by mainstream media networks — especially given how difficult it already was for these groups to let their dissatisfaction with this framing be known.

Methodology and Data Collection

In order to evaluate mainstream broadcast representations and interpretations of the Korean vs. Black narrative during the 1992 L.A. riots, I employ a content analysis sourced from the mainstream broadcast media outlets ABC News, CBS News, NBC News, and CNN. Through the University of Virginia library, I have access to abstracts of ABC News and CBS News coverage, and full video clips of NBC News and CNN coverage, using the Vanderbilt Television News Archive (VTNA). Using the advanced search method on the VTNA page, I narrowed the search using the keywords "L.A. riots" between March 1992 and June 1992, which would situate the results between the one-year anniversary of the killing of Latasha Harlins — a watershed moment for the Black American and Korean American communities in the Southern L.A. area — and the eventual outcry against the riots themselves in June. Excluding commercials and including news segments, program introductions, "Good Night" segments, specials, and evening news reports, 116 items were identified using this search method. From there, I specifically only counted clips that explicitly mentioned key terms relevant to coverage of the 1992 L.A. riots; among these included the words "violence," "Rodney King," "Koreatown," and "peace." In total,

[58] Nancy Abelmann and John Lie, "1992 Los Angeles Riots."

this eliminated 38 unrelated videos and resulted in a sample of 78 news clips, all of which mention the riots in some way. Additionally, I included three clips outside of the original specified "L.A. riots" keywords and were found using the keywords "Latasha Harlins." Two of the three clips from this group were aired in November of 1991; the third was aired in March of 1992. This brings the total sample to 81 news clips.

I recognize that my content analysis is in part shaped by my own positionality as a Korean American. Though I do not live or personally know anyone in the South-Central L.A. area in which these riots occurred, I both consciously and unconsciously draw on my own experiences of Korean American and Asian American identity discourses surrounding the 1992 L.A. riots to interpret these texts. Such positionality may even be considered a benefit under the tenets of standpoint theory, which argues that those at the bottom of certain hierarchies may actually be better equipped to discuss such hierarchies in an academic context because they are less removed than those speaking from a place of privilege.[59] This analysis incorporates discussion of marginalization, violence, victimization, and solidarity among the Asian American community, while maintaining a focus on how news media structure salience through journalistic presence and absence — the fundamentals of frame theory. I situate these clips in existing secondary research on media representations during the L.A. riots. Ultimately, I argue that mainstream broadcast journalism coverage of the 1992 L.A. riots promoted a narrative of interminority racism by presenting instances of tensions between the Korean American and Black American communities in L.A., while not presenting outreach and cooperative attempts between leaders of these two groups during this time. In noting the visuals and key phrases associated with Korean American subjects as opposed to those associated with Black American

[59] Sandra G. Harding, *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies* (Psychology Press, 2004).

subjects, I argue that Korean Americans became representative of white America and, by extension, a manifestation of the "American Dream" — that being the steadfast belief that working hard would lead to success in a fundamentally meritocratic and just American society. The juxtaposition is clear. Korean Americans are hard-working immigrants: they start businesses and chase after success in the right and proper ways, and they keep their head down, only engaging in violence to protect their property from unsavory types. Black Americans, conversely, are seen as unruly and disruptive; they feel entitled to justice rather than work to earn it, and they represent a threat to the way of life as white normative audiences see it. By framing the riots as a Black-Korean conflict, mainstream coverage blatantly ignored the feelings of abandonment and mistreatment by law enforcement and U.S. institutions pervasive in both communities, instead chasing after the far more compelling, if less holistically representative, story.

Major Themes

Analyzing clips from VTNA, two major themes emerge. First, the Korean American community is presented in a consistently favorable light so as to characterize the rioters — predominantly framed as Black — as villainous and senseless mobs intent on destroying peaceful ways of life. This uplifts the Korean American image as one of humble origins and hard work ethic, yet also casts them as victims stripped of agency and, by extension, humanity. The Black American and Korean American communities, when presented in the same news segment, are indeed seen as diametrically opposed groups, with Black Americans representing a threat to order and stability, and Korean Americans representing those just trying to get by in a time of

chaos. This news frame is only employed when Korean Americans are included in coverage — which is to say not often.

My second finding is that for all of the visual iconography of the 1992 L.A. riots featuring Korean Americans that has persisted in the cultural imaginary, Korean Americans and other Asian American groups often did not factor into discussions of race relations as a consequence of the riots. Instead, the focus was placed on Black and white America. This Black-white binary further cements the idea that Korean American subjects were not respected as equals to whites in this news coverage, but rather were vehicles through which white audiences could project themselves onto. Mainstream news cared more about presenting Black Americans as existing in a "culture of poverty" that they had brought unto themselves, at worst demonizing them and blaming internal problems rather than systemic institutions responsible for such socioeconomic predispositions. This meant that Korean Americans were used in news media more as a model to be compared to Black Americans, rather than as a community existing in its own right.

Absence and Presence of Korean American Perspectives

What is perhaps most immediately noteworthy from my study of these texts is the lack of sustained focus on the Korean American community in South-Central L.A. in national news coverage; of the clips examined, only seven had significant mention of Korean L.A. residents or Koreatown. This was an unexpected challenge because I had anticipated far more focus on Korean American perspectives in mainstream coverage. Though disheartening, this information is relevant in and of itself in that it suggests that the highly popularized imagery of Korean American shopkeepers — and of the Korean vs. Black narrative — has persisted in the cultural

imaginary not because of a vast swath of coverage depicting such figures, but rather was in spite of a paucity of such coverage. That being said, a notable limitation of this analysis lies in the fact that there are extremely notable instances of depictions of Korean American subjects that are simply not contained in VTNA. The Vanderbilt archive had no news clips featuring images of heavily armed Korean Americans standing atop roofs, defending their property from rioters and looters. Given just how prominent "Rooftop Koreans" imagery was in mainstream news based on existing scholarship, this appears to be a deficit in the archive itself, rather than an accurate reflection of the frequency of such coverage.

When Korean and Korean American subjects *are* included in news coverage, it is always through the lens of their status as small business owners and shopkeepers, victimized by the looting and destruction of property that occurred during the riots themselves; such framing casts them in a sympathetic light, encouraging audiences to "take their side" — especially when juxtaposed with the depiction of the rioting as mostly instigated and committed by Black demonstrators. One clip — from *CNN Evening News* and aired on Friday, May 1 — specifically centers around a march held in L.A.'s Koreatown, ending with interviews of multiple unnamed Korean citizens.[60] The lead reads: "In L.A.'s Koreatown district, an orderly march led by local business owners, their shops among the hardest hit by the riots. They say a message of peace is what's needed" — stressing once again the peaceful and nonviolent nature of the Korean American residents rallying together against the rioting.[61] The brief montage of interviews with attendees of the march includes quotes that are outspoken about the violence occurring but are largely non-confrontational and never carry the implication of anger. One Korean interviewee

[60] Bernard Shaw, "Los Angeles / Korea Town," filmed May 1, 1992, *CNN Evening News*, https://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/broadcasts/866634.
[61] Bernard Shaw, "Los Angeles / Korea Town."

concludes, “we were all attacked by other people, so we just want to say peace”; another says, “we love not only Korean people, but all of the American people.”[62]

The killing of Latasha Harlins was a recurring theme in coverage attempting to contextualize and explain relations between the Black American and Korean American communities in light of the L.A. riots. Latasha Harlins’ death fueled the Korean vs. Black narrative that dominated discussions of Korean American victimization.[63] An *ABC Evening News* clip from Saturday, May 2 centers its story on the reaction of the Korean American enclave to the riots, including prominent visuals of fires and burned-down buildings in Koreatown.[64] Store surveillance tape is placed at the end of the clip showing Latasha Harlins being shot — suggesting an easy admissibility of showing imagery of Black death.[65] In this case, the violent death of a Black child is seen as acceptable material to show wider audiences, leading one to question if the same attitude would have been taken had the child been white.

A similar story aired by *CBS Evening News* on Sunday, May 3 includes the same excerpt of security tape footage of the shooting of Latasha Harlins, as well as a brief mention of the suspended sentence Du received for her manslaughter conviction.[66] This then transitions into an attempted explanation of Black resentment towards Koreans by an unnamed interviewee and a statement from Walter Tucker, then mayor of Compton.[67] It should be noted that though this clip does explicitly articulate the animosity possessed by Korean Americans towards Black Americans, the focus of the story still largely works to portray Koreans in a way that valorizes them relative to Black L.A. residents. Richard Park, a Korean American business owner, recalls a

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[62] Bernard Shaw, “Los Angeles / Korea Town.”
[63] Brenda Stevenson, *The Contested Murder of Latasha Harlins*.
[64] Tom Foreman, “Los Angeles, California / Peacemakers,” filmed May 2, 1992, *ABC Evening News*, https://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/broadcasts/141330.
[65] Tom Foreman, “Los Angeles, California / Peacemakers.”
[66] John Blackstone, Bob Faw, and Bill Lagattuta, “Los Angeles, California / Violence / The Victim / Koreans,” filmed May 3, 1992, *CBS Evenings News*, https://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/broadcasts/344581.
[67] John Blackstone, Bob Faw, and Bill Lagattuta, “Violence / The Victim.”

confrontation with looters during the riots in which his relatives were shot; another Korean business owner Li-En Chaing mourns the destruction of her neighborhood, saying that the gutted stores were overwhelmingly Korean-owned.[68] The inclusion of Korean American subjects and their framing as innocent victims of needless and senseless violence — hardworking individuals who have done nothing wrong — is signified with footage of Korean American shopkeepers inside their establishments, showing the work that goes into running a business. This then implies directionality to the Black-Korean conflict, suggesting a narrative of Black harm being inflicted unto Koreans that has since persisted in modern remembrances of the riots. As quoted from an *NBC Evening News* segment from Saturday, May 2, Koreans are viewed as "victims of injustice," with one Korean interviewee present in the clip going so far as to argue that it is unfair that Koreans suffer the consequences when many of them do not agree with the verdict in the Rodney King case either.[69] Again, Korean American subjects are victimized, and Black American subjects are seen as the perpetrators of such harm unto these innocent and helpless communities.

"Mob" Framing and the Root Causes of Such Rioting

All clips examined had some visual (images or videos) of what is described as "lawlessness": arson, destruction of property, vandalism, and violent confrontations between rioters and federal and state task force officers. Despite scholarship and other secondary literature noting that the 1992 L.A. riots involved active participation from white, Asian, and Latino members of the L.A. community, it would be hard to draw this same conclusion just from the selected news clips; all featured demonstrators were identifiably Black, contributing to

[68] John Blackstone, Bob Faw, and Bill Lagattuta, "Violence / The Victim."
[69] George Lewis and Noah Nelson, "Los Angeles, California / Peace / Coping," filmed May 2, 1992, *NBC Evening News*, https://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/broadcasts/586631.

notions that the rioters were a monoracial group and thus emblematic of a racial problem brought on by social welfare programs and declining economic conditions within the Black community. A report from *NBC Evening News* originally aired on Thursday, April 30, for instance, begins with Tom Brokaw unequivocally condemning the "brutal vengeance in the name of protest," who then specifies that the riots are a manifestation of "how we all fail to deal with racism — Black *and* white racism."[70] Another *NBC Evening News* segment, this one from Monday, May 4, covers "the violent response [to the King verdict] and reaction to that violence."[71] In this clip, journalist Lisa Myers conducts street interviews with white L.A. residents, several of whom are resentful of what they perceive to be Black rioters using the verdict as "an excuse for them to go in and do wrong with the feeling that they weren't going to get caught."[72] There is mention of Black frustration with this reaction from white America, contributing to a general belief that the riots will set Black-white relations back.

Discussion of Black-white relations relies heavily on the notion of a "culture of poverty." This myth depicts a causal relationship between Black culture and poverty, suggesting that Black Americans disproportionately face harsh conditions (e.g. poverty, discrimination) because their culture is fundamentally flawed. Primarily utilized in an educational context, this includes claims that children in poverty are raised without paternal figures and need better role models.[73] The implication here is that people in poverty — most often regarded as people of color — are inferior on a basis of culture rather than biology or genetics. The "culture of poverty" myth thus perpetuates the belief that the struggles of impoverished communities are internal and not due to long-standing institutions built to keep them in precarious positions.

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[70] Tom Brokaw, "Los Angeles, California / Violence / Watts Riots," filmed Apr 30, 1991, *NBC Evening News*, https://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/broadcasts/586366.
[71] Lisa Myers, "Los Angeles, California / Violence / Race Relations," filmed May 4, 1992, *NBC Evening News*, https://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/broadcasts/586863.
[72] Lisa Myers, "Violence / Race Relations."
[73] Paul Gorski, "The Myth of the 'Culture of Poverty,'" *Educational Leadership* 65, no. 7 (2009): 32–36.

The "culture of poverty" myth is convenient for dominant groups in U.S. society — namely white Americans, which then influence mass media as an instrument of normalizing systems of power — in that it allows them to avoid addressing the tangible causes of Black and lower-income suffering. Because the fact that the system is exclusionary and racist runs contradictory to the ideals of American exceptionalism and the "work hard to succeed" myth, there is an impetus in U.S. culture to make excuses for the things that do not align with this worldview. This shifts responsibility away from the structural components that cause oppression and onto the oppressed themselves. As Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor explains, blaming those in poverty for their own oppression "[transforms] material causes into subjective causes," effectively framing the problem as one of "irresponsibility, erroneous social mores, and general bad behavior."[74] By placing the burden on individuals in poverty, rhetoric that denigrates Black Americans circumvents confronting the systemic change needed to reduce economic disparity, which contributes to and exacerbates income inequality.

Discussion within news coverage of "the problems of Black America" — referring to drugs, crime, poverty, and disintegration of the family — underscores that this event was understood even as it was occurring to be representative of a reckoning with race only held between white and Black Americans. Only one clip included signs of reconciliation among the ruins of Los Angeles, featuring local neighborhoods and asking for comments from Asian, white, and Black people. This content analysis thus indicates that the racialized component of the L.A. riots was still negotiated by mainstream media through the Black-white binary — leaving other racial minority groups, namely Asian Americans, out of the larger picture. Rhetoric that only understands race relations and racial animosity as an issue to be settled between Black and white

[74] Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Haymarket Books, 2016), 24.

Americans conforms to and reaffirms racially triangulated discourses and predominant ideologies.

Conclusion

This chapter gives considerable weight to the argument that mainstream broadcast journalism contributed to ideas of Black-Korean racial conflict and diametric opposition between Black and Asian Americans using principles of racial triangulation that alienate and uplift Asian Americans — in this case, the Korean American community of the Southern L.A. area during the 1992 L.A. riots. In an effort to draw viewership and make sense of the riots through a Black-white binary lens, which stands as the dominant way we view racial hierarchy, news networks presented Korean Americans as victims of Black violence, building public discourse around the naturalized ideology that few, if any, attempts were made at reconciliation or cooperation between these two groups. Of the news clips taken from VTNA and used for this content analysis, not one item made any mention of dialogue between the Black and Korean American L.A. communities, suggesting that they were not in conversation nor made any efforts to reach out and foster points of connection with one another. In reality, such dialogue was a huge part in building Korean American and Asian American identity, as will be elaborated upon in subsequent chapters. News framing thus only told one side of the story: a side dominated with tragedy discourse and rhetoric that stripped the humanity of Black Americans — whether they were directly involved in the riots or not.

Chapter 2: "A Racism Imbibed as Holy Water"

> *"[Rodney King's] not-guilty verdict was sown and harvested in this White racism,* ***a racism imbibed as holy water*** *by its White creators and defenders, an aspergillum used to sprinkle and anoint the faithful in Holy Communion, a racism apotheosized in pulpits, glorified in editorial pages, magnified in movies and television, sanctified in school textbooks. ... If White Americans do not now need, nor have they ever needed, a Civil Rights Bill to protect and enforce their 'rights' as citizens, why do African-Americans need a Civil Rights Bill?*
>
> - *Sylvester Leaks, "There will be more Rodney King cases"*[75]

Having considered mass media representations of the interminority race relations that preceded and then persisted during the 1992 L.A. riots, it is worth turning attention towards how the affected communities in South-Central L.A. themselves felt about such framing devices. To see representations of your community projected in the mainstream that you find to be reductive at best and offensive at worst is inherently disheartening. For those who did not have to worry about the riots happening right outside their homes — those who were not directly affected by the riots — this meant that the immediate concern went beyond gathering aid and support resources for those in need, but included questioning why instruments of power like mass media were presenting the conflict as wholly one informed by Black-Korean relations. Black Americans located in other parts of the country had the privilege of being able to take a step back from the chaos, evaluate what they were being told and by whom, and internally counter those racialized ideologies in their own circles.

This chapter advances the argument that the Black public sphere paradoxically resisted some dominant narratives about the riots and their material causes, while playing into and

[75] Sylvester Leaks, "There Will Be More Rodney King Cases," New York Amsterdam News, May 16, 1992, 13.

amplifying certain other narratives about Black-Korean relations. Minority press in particular during this time served as a platform for discourse between Black Americans situated across the country — many of whom had no personal connection to the riots, but mourned for their figurative brothers and sisters all the same — through not only journalistic coverage, but letters submitted by readers and audience members. These individuals felt united not under a shared geography, but through a Black cultural imaginary they equally partook in.

I define the Black minority press as an *affective racial counterpublic* — a safe space in which sentiments possessed by those in the Black community could be freely expressed away from looming white normative audiences because the platform was not intent on appealing towards the white normative ideal. This definition of affective racial counterpublics borrows heavily from the work of Rachel Kuo on racial presence in digital realms, who herself relies on a theoretical framework proposed and bolstered by Zizi Pappacharissi and Catherine Squire. Minority press is a precursor to such digital realms, yet shares similarities in its ability to discursively generate feelings of racial solidarity. This space challenged and directly confronted many of the racist characterizations of demonstrators during the riots, even critiquing mainstream coverage for the absence of certain causational factors, yet also accepted some of the most fundamental racialized comparisons between Black Americans and Korean Americans in Southern L.A. as fact. In doing so, they fed into interminority tensions, discouraged solidarity between the two groups, and did not question that the interests of both were diametrically opposed. This rhetoric, like all rhetoric contained in a dialogic space, is not monolithic in the slightest. Rather, it exposes the intricacies of marginalized communities when they are safe to express their honest opinions on matters affecting them the most.

Affective Racial Counterpublics: Situating Minority Press

Defining the term "affective racial counterpublic" necessitates breaking down each of its separate parts into more digestible chunks. This is far from a difficult task. "Affective" — relating to moods, feelings, and attitudes — implies an emotionality to the public that is being constructed: either positive or negative, and most likely both. "Racial" — relating to agreed categorizations of race and racial formation — suggests that racial and ethnic identity markers are the focal point around which this public is built. And "counterpublic," as elaborated upon by those in the study of critical feminist theory like Rita Felski and Nancy Fraser, is simply a reactionary space formed as a result of exclusion from the dominant public, where said excluded parties can engage in discourse themselves.[76] Put together, this suggests that an affective racial counterpublic is a kind of public space, separated from the mainstream, that is created for a racial community to express and share sentiments with one another about issues and topics of importance to these particular individuals.

To examine the significance of a "counterpublic" implies we must also examine the significance of a "public," seeing as the existence of the former implies the existence of the latter. It is through positioning to this established non-counterpublic — a "public" — that a counterpublic derives meaning. Writing expressly about this juxtaposition, Michael Warner distinguishes between three types of publics. They are: *the* public, which is "a kind of social totality"; a public in reference to a defined audience, again total in the sense that it is "bounded by the event or by the shared physical space"; and then a public in reference to an undefined audience, "the kind of public that comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulation."[77] The third and final public consists of the white primary that dominant news

[76] Catherine R. Squires, "Rethinking the Black Public Sphere: An Alternative Vocabulary for Multiple Public Spheres," *Communication Theory* 12, no. 4 (2002): 446–68.
[77] Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (Zone Books, 2002).

sources appeal towards with their coverage. Counterpublics, accordingly, target non-normative audiences: groups that are often neglected, or otherwise forgotten, in these contexts. In practice, affective racial counterpublics would largely consist of minority and marginalized racial groups, those most often left out of mainstream representations of society.

The Black press is just one manifestation of a Black counterpublic that has existed since the inception of the United States. Counterpublics, Joanna Brooks writes, "foster political and cultural activities that allow working-class and other disfranchised persons to reclaim a measure of subjectivity despite being positioned as the instruments, objects, or properties of the middle class."[78] Naturally, Black communities — often coalescing around a shared trauma and generational memories of hardship under slavery and racism — developed public spheres and ways to interact with one another that long precede the public spheres of any other racial minority group. Catherine Squires, in her work on the Black public sphere and the specific role that the Black press plays in this, is careful to acknowledge that the term Black public sphere "does not presume a monolithic, global Black public."[79] Rather, heterogeneous Black publics emerge across different communities gathered over lines of identity that go beyond race — whether that be class or, most pertinent to this chapter, geography. Black public spheres work to rearticulate identity and engage with the wider public. Paradoxically, Black public spheres are both secluded from and exposed to the mainstream; it is a place where Black thought is concentrated. Minority press, therefore, can "enclave itself," meaning it hides away from white dominant society, while also creating a counterpublic that engages "in debate with wider publics to test ideas and perhaps utilize traditional social movement tactics."[80] They provide safe spaces

[78] Joanna Brooks, "The Early American Public Sphere and the Emergence of a Black Print Counterpublic," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (2005), 70.
[79] Catherine R. Squires, "Rethinking the Black Public Sphere," 454.
[80] Catherine R. Squires, "Rethinking the Black Public Sphere," 448.

through independent media distributions, but are also constantly influenced by their interactions with the broader public — often not of their own volition.[81]

Where does the *affective* nature of such communities play into the construction of these spaces? Rachel Kuo, in outlining her vision of affective racial counterpublics, argues that the emotionality of racial solidarity within these counterpublics "[creates] the effect of boundaries" through which groups can define themselves and others.[82] In doing so, she then underscores how racial presence and visibility can bring together "activist discourses with mainstream media narratives" to facilitate flows of information.[83] It is the feelings expressed by minority groups that bring meaning to the media they produce; their challenges to the mainstream are informed by such sentiments and emotional reactions to outsider perceptions and representations. Though Kuo primarily outlines this in the context of social media platforms, especially the use of discursive digital artifacts for Asian Americans, I extend this logic to argue that the minority press, more specifically ethnic media, should also be read as an affective racial counterpublic that provides a platform for racialized discourse to take place. Representations in mass media are a form of performance that normalize ideas of who constitutes a political body; minority press and ethnic media work to push self-representations.[84] In the case of the 1992 L.A. riots, the mainstream developed an increased interest in Korean American and Black American subjects, opening a window of opportunity for the press outlets of these communities to put themselves in conversation with larger forces and vehicles of more dominant ideologies.

Ethnic media goes hand in hand with discussing the existence and growing relevance of micro media industries. Lori Kido Lopez engages in this particular work with the understanding

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[81] Catherine R. Squires, "Rethinking the Black Public Sphere."
[82] Rachel Kuo, "Visible Solidarities: #Asians4BlackLives and Affective Racial Counterpublics," *Studies in Transition States and Societies* 10, no. 2 (2018), 45.
[83] Rachel Kuo, "Visible Solidarities," 45.
[84] Rachel Kuo, "Visible Solidarities."

that relatively small ethnic communities lack the established media infrastructure — and, subsequently, the media power — that diasporic populations with larger numbers frequently utilize and employ to develop shared feelings of commonality and affiliation.[85] Kido Lopez defines micro media industries as "small-scale versions of media production and distribution modeled after traditional forms of mass media," and she proceeds to identify the distinguishing factor between micro media and media industries as a series of key limiting factors, such as staffing, funding, and audience size.[86] By differentiating micro media industries from community media — which more broadly include media practices that subvert, counter, and even directly challenge normative ideologies presented in the mainstream — she places an emphasis on the logistical, *industrial* component of efforts from marginalized communities to see themselves reflected in their products. Though the Black American and Korean American populace are far from interchangeable, both struggle for a sense of belonging in the mainstream because their peoples have endured historical erasures and possess a minority status. And so micro media industries, Kido Lopez finds, are far from sparse; rather, they are thriving spaces imbued with high quality representations and evolving discourses around what it means to be a minority in a country that neglects to recognize your identity.

Our modern participatory media culture, enabled by the development of digital technologies and new online spaces that platform such dialogues, gives everyday citizens the chance to work as "bottom-up facilitators and moderators of community-level conversations" themselves — but this was not a reality even thirty years ago.[87] Without access to such platforms, it was journalism, and more specifically ethnic media, that fulfilled this role, grounding itself in

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[85] Lori Kido Lopez, *Micro Media Industries: Hmong American Media Innovation in the Diaspora* (Rutgers University Press, 2021).
[86] Lori Kido Lopez, *Micro Media Industries*, 4.
[87] Mark Deuze, "Towards Professional Participatory Storytelling in Journalism and Advertising," *First Monday* 10, no. 7 (2005), https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/download/1257/1177.

the expectation that news media build up societies. They often challenge stereotypes promoted by the mainstream "by providing more auspicious and diverse portrayals of minority groups."[88] Naturally, the power of the Black press in the 1990s was undoubtedly weaker than it had been in previous eras; for example, the Black press played a pivotal part in advancing the aims of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, and its range in the decades after was far less pronounced.[89] Nevertheless, minority press outlets — and the voices they privilege — situate themselves as more authentic self-representations of racial minority attitudes towards the L.A. riots, because members of the affected community felt more comfortable speaking to their reporters and trusted that they would be represented fairly and accurately.

The Black Press and the L.A. Riots: The *Los Angeles Sentinel*

News coverage of the 1992 L.A. riots from mass media outlets sparked reactions — and pushback — from minority press outlets in the area. This contrast in coverage resulted in a number of analyses from a handful of scholars over the years. Ronald Jacobs writes in *Race, Media, and the Crisis of Civil Society* that journalists working for the *Los Angeles Times* saw the riots as an indication that efforts towards improving race relations and encouraging cooperation between races — white, Black, and less importantly Asian — were not working.[90] Here, the Black-white binary still dominates coverage. The Black-owned *Los Angeles Sentinel*, on the other hand, saw the problem as lying within dominant public discourse — critiquing the mainstream's limiting approaches to race and racism.[91] Though he notes that the *Los Angeles Times'* coverage of the riots was a stark improvement from its coverage of the Watts riots in the

[88] Srividya Ramasubramanian, Marissa Joanna Doshi, and Muniba Saleem, "Mainstream Versus Ethnic Media: How They Shape Ethnic Pride and Self-Esteem Among Ethnic Minority Audiences," *International Journal of Communication* 11 (2017), 1880.
[89] Mike Davis and Jon Wiener, *Set the Night on Fire.*
[90] Ronald N. Jacobs, *Race, Media, and the Crisis of Civil Society*.
[91] Ronald N. Jacobs, *Race, Media, and the Crisis of Civil Society.*

1960s, it still often dismissed Black criticisms of police brutality in the Southern L.A. region. As discussed in the previous chapter, this coverage labeled Black Americans as part of the problem, rather than the victims of a false promise, trapped in a system that had never given them a chance to succeed. Black newspapers located in other parts of the country, then, were "unable to provide significant amounts of coverage on the events," which left them reliant on dominant news framing of race relations in L.A.[92]

In *Newspaper Coverage of Interethnic Conflict*, Hemant Shah and Michael Thornton also find that the *Los Angeles Times* attributed causes of the riots to individuals rather than institutions — eerily echoing the findings of the previous chapter on mainstream broadcast news channels. Meanwhile, Black papers like the *Sentinel* stressed the intersection of racial injustice and economic inequality, drawing clear divides between demonstrators against police brutality and opportunistic rioters and looters using the protests for their own personal gain.[93] They stressed the discrimination of Black communities in L.A. and beyond, pointing to a broken judicial system and the myth of the American Dream. This coverage was far more critical of American society than mainstream coverage, which works to reaffirm American ideals and fundamental ideologies imperative to sustaining those in power. This was true in the case of riot coverage even if it meant specifying that the rioters were Black Americans, thus affirming the "culture of poverty" and other negative characterizations of Black Americans during the riots.

Yet, even if the Black minority press was paramount in identifying and challenging structural-level causes of the riots, discussions of interethnic conflict and Black-Korean relations are shockingly antagonistic. The Black-white binary is not just promoted and pushed by mass media outlets; minority and ethnic press, too, can perpetuate troubling narratives around racial

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[92] Catherine R. Squires, *African Americans and the Media* (Polity Press, 2009), 73.
[93] Hemant Shah and Michael C. Thornton, *Newspaper Coverage of Interethnic Conflict.*

structures and race relations, if they are not cognizant of this or actively working against it. The press habitually conforms to a Black-white binary that neglects the multifaceted nature of race in America; though they "tend toward a more sophisticated view of racial dynamics," ethnic media are not exempt from this impulse.[94]

Shah and Thornton see this most obviously with the neglect of Korean Americans in Black minority press outlets. When journalists for Black-owned newspapers did mention the Korean American community in L.A., they accused its merchants "of disrespecting Black communities and customers," suggesting that Korean Americans had "exploited [Black neighborhoods] by extracting profits from the area and funneling the gains into non-Black areas."[95] This could not be more different than the *Los Angeles Times*' and mainstream broadcast coverage, which presented Korean Americans as hard workers and incapable of exploitation. Shah and Thornton identify Koreans as "villains" in Black press coverage, with some even taking a hard stance on Black-Korean relations and rejecting the possibility of solidarity between the two.

Ironically, Shah and Thornton state that even with the intense criticism of Korean American shopkeepers, news coverage in the Black minority press still "argued that those businesses had something to teach Blacks," meaning that discussions of reform to developing Black businesses often saw Korean Americans as a role model.[96] In agreeing with the Black-white binary and principles of racial triangulation, the Black press in Shah and Thornton's study did not tackle the prejudices and oppression Korean Americans faced, as well as the losses they sustained.[97] The Korean American community was largely considered to be inherently

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[94] Michael C. Thornton, "Meaningful Dialogue? The *Los Angeles Sentinel*'s Depiction of Black and Asian American Relations, 1993-2000," *Journal of Black Studies* 42, no. 8 (2011), https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934711410316.
[95] Hemant Shah and Michael C. Thornton, *Newspaper Coverage of Interethnic Conflict*, 172.
[96] Hemant Shah and Michael C. Thornton, *Newspaper Coverage of Interethnic Conflict*, 186.
[97] Hemant Shah and Michael C. Thornton, *Newspaper Coverage of Interethnic Conflict.*

opposed to Black American success and prosperity in the area; "solutions to the problem" — that being the riots — "rarely included Korean Americans in the process," and actively dehumanized these subjects "even though they were, statistically speaking, primary victims in the disturbance."[98]

Fortunately, this is not a framing device that has persisted in such coverage of interminority race relations. In the *Sentinel*'s presentation of relations between Black and Asian Americans in the years following the riots, Thornton independently finds that coverage greatly improved in presenting other racial minorities; the *Sentinel*'s reporting on Asian Americans almost tripled.[99] Not only did the quantity itself increase, though, but the quality of such coverage moved beyond the villainous framing of Korean American merchants and instead highlighted Black support against racially motivated attacks on Asian Americans. "From 1993 to 2000," Thornton writes, "the *Sentinel*'s coverage took on the view that Asian Americans, people of color also, although sometimes in conflict with Black communities, shared experiences and lives and a collective assault by the wider environment in overlapping if not similar ways."[100]

Methodology and Data Collection

To determine sentiments contained in some of the most simultaneously public-facing and self-sustaining affective racial counterpublics of the 1990s, I employ a textual and discourse analysis of several prominent Black newspapers of the time, setting the time frame for articles between March of 1991 and June of 1993 — so as to begin with the killing of Latasha Harlins and end with the one-year anniversary of the L.A. riots. Specifically, these newspapers are as follows: the *New York Amsterdam News*, the *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, and the *New*

[98] Hemant Shah and Michael C. Thornton, *Newspaper Coverage of Interethnic Conflict*, 187.
[99] Michael C. Thornton, "Meaningful Dialogue?"
[100] Michael C. Thornton, "Meaningful Dialogue?"

Pittsburgh Courier. All articles are sourced from the Proquest Historical Black Newspaper database; the University of Virginia library grants me access to these papers. Full text coverage is offered for the *New York Amsterdam News*, representing New York City, from January 6, 1962 to December 31, 1993. For the *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, representing the city Norfolk in Virginia, full text coverage is offered from September 30, 1916 to December 31, 2003. And for the *New Pittsburgh Courier*, representing Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania, full text coverage is offered for issues between July 4, 1981 and December 31, 2002.

Notably, these papers are all based in cities on the East Coast of the U.S., far away from Los Angeles itself. Naturally, the first question that will arise is: *why is the Los Angeles Sentinel — the largest Black newspaper on the West Coast — not included in this analysis?* In short, the fact that the *Sentinel* is located in Los Angeles and was highly active during the riots means it has been a prime target for academic inquiry, both immediately after the riots and in the decades since its conclusion. As the previous section on existing scholarship has proven, researchers have already invested much time and attention to the *Sentinel*'s coverage and gleaned much from its study. What has gone understudied, however, is the response from Black newspapers in *other* parts of the country during the riots, and whether these avenues for discussion concur with the conclusions reached by the *Sentinel*'s journalistic team. It is a mistake to treat the Black minority press as a monolith, and it is worth considering if different outlets had different attitudes toward the riots and what exactly they believed the riots represented. By comparing coverage of the riots in these three newspapers to coverage of the riots in the *Sentinel* — all while comparing conceptions of racial inequity and racial triangulation held by those on the East and West Coasts — I argue that this strengthens the fundamental idea that affective racial counterpublics are determined more by the space they occupy (in this case, the geographical location) than the line

of identity they represent (in this case, race). In the modern day, affective racial counterpublics largely exist online, thus transcending physical distances and contributing to a shared and ubiquitous Black identity. In the 1990s, before the advent of the Internet, racial communities were confined to those you could directly access: those who lived in your area. While these separate communities can now easily communicate with one another using digital social media platforms, this was not the case during the riots. And just as racial minorities in urban centers develop their own unique geographical distinctions and traditions — the rise of different styles of hip hop and rap in different cities is just one example — discourses around racial identity also vary, if only slightly, between these cultural hubs. Thus, I seek to explore whether these nuances bleed into coverage of an event that, while more intensely experienced by one specific community in South-Central L.A., had a pronounced effect on perceptions of racial violence and infrastructural failings for *all* Black Americans.

Using the ProQuest archives, I began by using the keywords "L.A. riots" in the advanced search feature for each newspaper; this yielded 309 results for the *Amsterdam News*, 1,117 results for the *New Journal and Guide*, and 47 results for the *New Pittsburgh Courier*. Applying the custom date range filter narrowed this down to 29 results, 15 results, and 20 results respectively — totaling to 64 articles in total. Adding articles from this same date range that included the relevant keyword "Latasha," and excluding articles that included the name "Latasha" but either did not refer to Latasha Harlins or only included brief mention to Harlins with no substantial coverage, resulted in one additional article to the sample. It should be noted that though the keywords "Rodney King" did lead to a much greater number of articles — 167, 77, and 100 respectively — these articles overwhelmingly had no reference to the L.A. riots and instead referred either to the initial incident of police brutality that led to King's prominence in

mainstream news, the trial of his four assailants and their eventual not-guilty verdict, or a series of demonstrations and riots that broke out in the cities where these newspapers were based, namely Harlem in New York City. In total, I identified nine additional articles from the *New Pittsburgh Courier* related to the riots, and to Black-Korean relations, using "Rodney King" as a search term, and one additional article from the *Amsterdam News*. This amounted to a total sample of 75 articles across all three newspapers for the content analysis. These articles were examined for their framing of the riots and the conditions that had precipitated them, with special attention given to the coverage of Black-Korean relations and Asian American presence in the South-Central L.A. area.

This analysis concurs with the conclusions drawn by Shah and Thornton. Specifically, it finds that these Black press outlets were far more critical of the L.A. police force and other institutions of power, both for the Rodney King verdict and their response to the riots that followed; there is a pervasive skepticism among these Black journalists that is then applied to the coverage pushed by mass media outlets. Yet the Black-white binary here is not challenged, and representations of Korean Americans in the L.A. region vary from aligning them with whiteness — and thus treating them as though they can never be on the same side as Black Americans — to emphasizing their inhospitality, undesirability, and unwanted infestation of Black neighborhoods — playing into the forever foreigner and yellow peril stereotypes that have plagued Asian American populations for generations. Though Black press outlets are incredibly sympathetic towards Black American subjects, which comes as a refreshing change of pace from mainstream coverage that routinely demonizes them and strips them of their humanity, this same treatment is not extended to members of the Korean American diaspora, both in L.A. and in other urban centers where Korean Americans have settled. Thus, discussions of racism that speak to the

complexities of race relations do not incorporate Korean Americans into such considerations, conforming to dominant news framing of interminority race relations as each working to hold the other back.

Racism is to Blame: Causes of the Riots

We begin with a piece published in the *Amsterdam News* on May 16 of 1992. In it, Cathy Connors writes that "there are no simplistic answers to racism" and criticizes the "maudlin whining about lifestyles of the urban poor … [as] if lifestyle is any answer to complex issues arising from the aftermath of the King verdict."[101] In doing so, she directly opposes the "culture of poverty" framing employed by mainstream sources to explain away the deviant behavior of Black demonstrators and rioters. This is made all the more clear with the following quote:

> If you believe that social work issues — unwed mothers, for example — can answer serious, multi-faceted questions, perhaps one will believe anything. Social work issues have little to do with the complexities facing America today. The rioters, perhaps unschooled, alienated and desperately angry, are hardly able to understand their own actions. But when a man knows without a shadow of a doubt that he's been tracked — and/or tricked — into a life cycle of inescapable poverty, the struggle to sustain hope, faith and the promise of America evaporates as so much dew in the mid-morning sun. At that point, the man belongs to no one but himself. Our prisons are full of such men.[102]

What does this excerpt — and, more broadly, Black press response to the riots — tell us about the contrast between mainstream and minority framings? Firstly, it underscores just how sharp and scathing the Black press can be in opposing narratives promoted in dominant news circles. Here, Connors writes a biting review of the American Dream, identifying it as a false hope recognized as nothing more than a pipe dream for those under extreme conditions of

[101] Cathy Connors, "There are No Simplistic Answers to Racism," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 16, 1992, 10.
[102] Cathy Connors, "There are No Simplistic Answers to Racism," 10.

generational poverty. She is far from alone in holding this belief; the three newspapers examined in this content analysis all include a depth of coverage declaring that the problem of the riots was not the rioting itself — but the infrastructures that had enabled the rioting to occur.

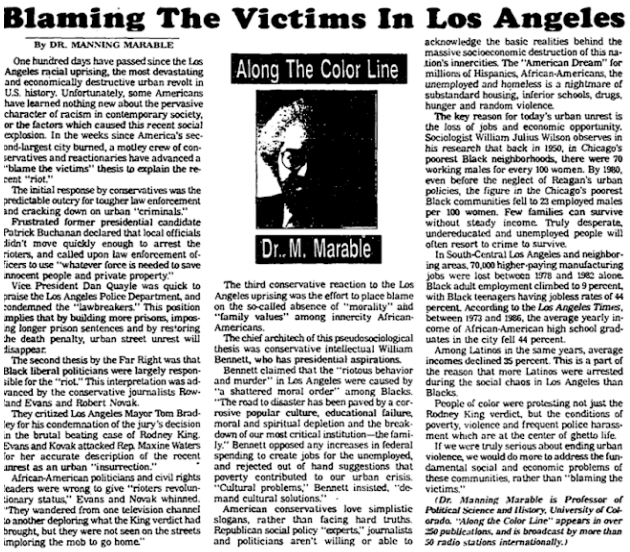
Rather than an unexplainable occurrence defined by senselessness and chaos, as mass media outlets liked to frame the riots, the Black press and its readers viewed the explosion of violence as understandable, even predictable, given the state of Southern L.A. and its residents. Far more attention is paid to the economy of South-Central L.A. in Black media sources than in the mainstream, and how this may have had an effect on the likelihood of violent demonstrations. The Rodney King verdict, and the riots more generally, are rhetorically utilized to expose how people of color, namely Black Americans, are hit hardest by cycles of fiscal crises. For instance, "THE URBAN AGENDA" by David R. Jones in the *Amsterdam News*, released just days after the riots had ended, underscores the decline of jobs in New York and other cities to call for public policy to "step in with jobs that can, for example, help rebuild our crumbling city infrastructures."[103] This is a sentiment persistent in coverage of Black rioters, working to contextualize the chaos rather than attribute it to morally bankrupt individuals with a flawed urban culture. Joel Goodman writes in a letter to the editor of the *Amsterdam News*, over a month after the riots had ended, that he is "shocked to see that no one can be honest enough to deal with the real issues before us."[104] He goes on to elaborate that the people in South-Central L.A. are not treated like human beings, following in a pattern of "putting African-Americans into ghettoes and ignoring them since slavery."[105] Because of a stagnation in social status and general well-being, largely attributed to the cutting and ending of social programs, Goodman argues that

[103] David R. Jones, "THE URBAN AGENDA: The Real Lesson of Rodney King," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 9, 1992, 5.
[104] Joel Goodman, "In the Wake of L.A. We Must Do Better," *New York Amsterdam News*, Jun 20, 1992, 12.
[105] Joel Goodman, "In the Wake of L.A.," 12.

Americans must "give these people a chance" by affording them trust, opportunity, and dignity.[106]

Chiefly, however, Goodman's piece points to another recurring theme in Black press coverage of the riots. Towards the end of his letter, he states that it is "abundantly clear that we are not doing enough (or anything in some cases) to help those who need it (Black or White)."[107] The parenthetical is key here: Goodman develops the framework of race using a Black-white binary. Korean Americans are, again, excluded from this discussion of those left vulnerable by a widespread American apathy — despite the fact that Korean Americans in the area experienced some of the worst effects of such economic squalor. Just as mainstream media found it difficult to conceptualize Korean Americans as economically disadvantaged and were much more inclined to frame them as successful immigrant communities, the Black press characterized Korean Americans as existing independently of the conditions that enabled Black and white poverty and hardship. Little consideration is shown towards the similarities between these two groups, and the racism they both endure, even as such coverage points to racism as the primary catalyst of the riots themselves.

[106] Joel Goodman, "In the Wake of L.A.," 12.
[107] Joel Goodman, "In the Wake of L.A.," 12.



Blaming The Victims In Los Angeles

By DR. MANNING MARABLE

One hundred days have passed since the Los Angeles racial uprising, the most devastating and economically destructive urban revolt in U.S. history. Unfortunately, some Americans have learned nothing new about the pervasive character of racism in contemporary society, or the factors which caused this recent social explosion. In the weeks since America's second-largest city burned, a motley crew of conservatives and reactionaries have advanced a "blame the victims" thesis to explain the recent "riot."

The initial response by conservatives was the predictable outcry for tougher law enforcement and cracking down on urban "criminals."

Frustrated former presidential candidate Patrick Buchanan declared that local officials didn't move quickly enough to arrest the rioters, and called upon law enforcement officers to use "whatever force is needed to save innocent people and private property."

Vice President Dan Quayle was quick to praise the Los Angeles Police Department, and condemned the "lawbreakers." This position implies that by building more prisons, imposing longer prison sentences and by restoring the death penalty, urban street unrest will disappear.

The second thesis by the Far Right was that Black liberal politicians were largely responsible for the "riot." This interpretation was advanced by the conservative journalists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak.

They critized Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley for his condemnation of the jury's decision in the brutal beating case of Rodney King. Evans and Kovak attacked Rep. Maxine Waters for her accurate description of the recent unrest as an urban "insurrection."

African-American politicians and civil rights leaders were wrong to give "rioters revolutionary status," Evans and Novak whined. "They wandered from one television channel to another deploring what the King verdict had brought, but they were not seen on the streets imploring the mob to go home."

Along The Color Line

Dr. M. Marable

The third conservative reaction to the Los Angeles uprising was the effort to place blame on the so-called absence of "morality" and "family values" among innercity African-Americans.

The chief architech of this pseudosociological thesis was conservative intellectual William Bennett, who has presidential aspirations.

Bennett claimed that the "riotous behavior and murder" in Los Angeles were caused by "a shattered moral order" among Blacks. "The road to disaster has been paved by a corrosive popular culture, educational failure, moral and spiritual depletion and the breakdown of our most critical institution—the family." Bennett opposed any increases in federal spending to create jobs for the unemployed, and rejected out of hand suggestions that poverty contributed to our urban crisis. "Cultural problems," Bennett insisted, "demand cultural solutions."

American conservatives love simplistic slogans, rather than facing hard truths. Republican social policy "experts," journalists and politicians aren't willing or able to acknowledge the basic realities behind the massive socioeconomic destruction of this nation's innercities. The "American Dream" for millions of Hispanics, African-Americans, the unemployed and homeless is a nightmare of substandard housing, inferior schools, drugs, hunger and random violence.

The key reason for today's urban unrest is the loss of jobs and economic opportunity. Sociologist William Julius Wilson observes in his research that back in 1950, in Chicago's poorest Black neighborhoods, there were 70 working males for every 100 women. By 1980, even before the neglect of Reagan's urban policies, the figure in the Chicago's poorest Black communities fell to 23 employed males per 100 women. Few families can survive without steady income. Truly desperate, undereducated and unemployed people will often resort to crime to survive.

In South-Central Los Angeles and neighboring areas, 70,000 higher-paying manufacturing jobs were lost between 1978 and 1982 alone. Black adult employment climbed to 9 percent, with Black teenagers having jobless rates of 44 percent. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, between 1973 and 1986, the average yearly income of African-American high school graduates in the city fell 44 percent.

Among Latinos in the same years, average incomes declined 25 percent. This is a part of the reason that more Latinos were arrested during the social chaos in Los Angeles than Blacks.

People of color were protesting not just the Rodney King verdict, but the conditions of poverty, violence and frequent police harassment which are at the center of ghetto life.

If we were truly serious about ending urban violence, we would do more to address the fundamental social and economic problems of these communities, rather than "blaming the victims."

(Dr. Manning Marable is Professor of Political Science and History, University of Colorado. "Along the Color Line" appears in over 250 publications, and is broadcast by more than 50 radio stations internationally.)

Figure 3. "Blaming the Victims In Los Angeles" (Manning Marable/*New Pittsburgh Courier*).[108]

A prominent narrative expressed through Black press coverage is that the Black constituency of South-Central L.A. had been failed by the American Dream. This is with particular attention paid towards the socioeconomic status of many based in Southern L.A. and the lack of safety nets for these individuals. On September 5, 1992, an article in the *New Pittsburgh Courier* by Dr. Manning Marable attacks "a motley crew of conservatives and reactionaries [who] have advanced a 'blame the victims' thesis to explain the recent 'riot.'"[109] There are a few things of note in the article — for one, Marable's use of quotations around the word "riot" suggests he believes this is an inaccurate or inadequate term — but chiefly it argues that the rioters were "protesting not just the Rodney King verdict, but the conditions of poverty, violence and frequent police harassment which are at the center of ghetto life."[110] Additionally, he writes that conservatives are unwilling to acknowledge the realities of living in South-Central L.A.: namely, that "the 'American Dream' for millions of Hispanics, African-Americans, the

[108] Manning Marable, "Blaming the Victims in Los Angeles: Along the Color Line," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, Sep 5, 1992, 5.
[109] Manning Marable, "Blaming the Victims," 5.
[110] Manning Marable, "Blaming the Victims," 5.

unemployed and homeless is a nightmare of substandard housing, inferior schools, drugs, hunger and random violence."[111] Again, we see the exclusion of Asian Americans from this sweeping overview of L.A. poverty, which implies that Asian Americans, and the Korean American community here, were not regarded as feeling the effects of such poverty. This is further supported by a number of statistics listed and research cited later in the article that observes poor neighborhoods in South-Central L.A., yet only includes mention of Black and Latino economic hardships. Clearly, Asian Americans are seen as separate here from other people of color; they are visibly absent from calls for the marginalized in L.A. to band together and unite.

Inclusion of Asian Americans in discussions of socioeconomic disparity and social stratification varies widely between writers. The *Amsterdam News* published an article on May 9, 1992 on the "masses of alienated and dehumanized human beings for whom the American Dream is nothing but a living nightmare."[112] The piece regards capitalism, the ruling class, and its media as evil forces that use the "coercive powers of their state to put out the fires of rage set by desperate and impoverished people of color."[113] The editorial does one thing that mass media often neglect to mention: it points out that those who participated in the "L.A. insurrection" were Black, Latino, Asian, and White — individuals of all races, unified under a feeling of anger fueled by the absurdities of American life. This is a rare occurrence; only one other piece, entitled "There Will Be More Rodney King Cases" by Sylvester Leaks in the *Amsterdam News*, points out that the King verdict created a "unity in rage among African-Americans, Mexican-Americans, Asian-Americans and some White Americans."[114] But Rojas then writes that "Blacks, Latinos and poor people" understand police brutality and the state's repressive

[111] Manning Marable, "Blaming the Victims," 5.
[112] Don Rojas, "Sober Reflections on the Rebellion of Los Angeles," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 9, 1992, 4.
[113] Don Rojas, "Sober Reflections," 4.
[114] Sylvester Leaks, "More Rodney King Cases," 13.

nature, once again leaving out Asian Americans from this coalition-building framework.[115] Thus, Korean Americans are still alienated from the alliance formed between Black Americans and Hispanic Americans in the Southern L.A. area.

Coverage in the Black press does not wholly neglect Korean Americans, or exclude them from the picture — but even when Korean Americans are present, they are often still used in contrast, either positively or negatively, to other racial minority groups. "A Righteous Rage" by Abiola Sinclair in the *Amsterdam News* does mention Korean Americans being "ripped off by greedy landlords," and points to Korean American merchants as a positive example of how communities banding together can result in economic prosperity, as seen with the Korean Merchants Association that helps its members with sale concerns.[116] This aligns with Shah and Thornton's finding that the Black press, when positively characterizing Asian Americans, often did so by setting them up as a model to which the Black community could aspire towards.[117] Yet the piece, which centers around a lack of such support systems in the Black community, concludes that "Blacks and Hispanics can rebuild Los Angeles" and does not include discussion of how Korean Americans also face the same broader problems with upward social mobility that they do.[118] This lack of perceived unity between racial groups is implicitly addressed in one piece by Ben Chavis in the *New Journal and Guide* on May 27, 1992, when he writes that "the forces of oppression [have] engendered mistrust, conflict, and a devastating divide and conquer strategy among the people of color communities in Los Angeles, i.e., African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans."[119] He adds that the challenge is to come together to make a demand for justice — which must be made "within a social context of mutual respect for the

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[115] Don Rojas, "Sober Reflections," 50.
[116] Abiola Sinclair, "MEDIA WATCH: A Righteous Rage," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 9, 1992, 26.
[117] Hemant Shah and Michael C. Thornton, *Newspaper Coverage of Interethnic Conflict*.
[118] Abiola Sinclair, "A Righteous Rage," 26.
[119] Ben Chavis, "Reflections from Los Angeles," *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, May 27, 1992, 2.

humanity of all persons."[120] It appears that Chavis is aware of — and, on some level, acknowledging — that Hispanic and Asian Americans have not been included in Black conceptions of racial equity and an advancement of rights. His writing serves to indirectly urge members of the Black audience to see other racial minorities as fighting the same fight: as allies, rather than rivals for the same economic and social resources.

Further Evidence Of White-Media Bigotry

By JAMES STRONG

STRONG POINTS

The white-controlled media have come under heavy criticism from Blacks and whites for their coverage of the Los Angeles riots. In a visit to South Central Los Angeles, the Rev. Jesse Jackson heard denials by local community leaders and Black youth that the youth were responsible for setting the fires which burned down businesses and apartment buildings.

They maintain that most of the fires were set by professional arsonists or business owners who wanted to collect fire insurance. That's why white media portrayal of the fire setters as mostly young out-of-control Blacks irks South Central residents to the max.

Yet, even more criticism has surfaced over the way the white media portray the videotaped beating of white truck driver Reginald Denny. Despite published statements by eyewitnesses that Denny instigated his own beating by yelling racial slurs at Black youth standing on the street corner, calling them niggers and coons, the white media chose first to disregard the accusations, then to ignore them and finally to downplay them.

Most Blacks are not startled at the bias incumbent in white-media news reporting of the Black community. For centuries, the white media have been the vermin upholding slavery, supporting segregation and undergirding bigotry in America. Their claim of objectivity in news reporting, to the ears of African-Americans, sounds more like the ravings of a false messiah than the argument of a credible authority.

The distrust becomes even more apparent when you consider other recent examples of white-media bigotry.

At the *Los Angeles Times*, for example, Black and white reporters have accused the paper of *bigotry in its news coverage* of the Black community. They complain that, for years, the paper's editors have downplayed stories about racial hostility and potential racial conflict in the Los Angeles area.

They cite instances in which editors have criticized reporters for taking too seriously Black-Korean problems, have changed words in articles about South Central Los Angeles to tone down statements about Black distrust of whites and had rejected stories suggesting the possibility of race riots.

The *Nashville Tennessean*, a white-owned newspaper in Nashville, Tennessee, was recently forced to admit it practiced *bigotry in its circulation policy* toward its Black readership. The story slowly unfolded when the paper reported that a local Domino's pizza franchise was refusing to deliver to some predominantly Black areas.

The story really picked up velocity when the *Nashville Scene*, an alternative weekly, disclosed that the *Tennessean* itself was discouraging people in low-income, heavily Black neighborhoods from buying the paper.

Craig Moon, publisher of the Gannett paper, admitted that when people in mostly Black neighborhoods call the *Tennessean's* circulation department, the letter "U," for undesirable, appears on a computer screen next to their addresses. These callers must pay for their subscription in advance, while customers elsewhere in the city are billed after delivery has begun.

(By the way, Gannett is an international multimedia conglomerate owning numerous well-known newspapers, magazines and radio and television stations, including *U.S. News Today* and a CBS-affiliated TV station.)

In New York, some community leaders have encouraged Blacks to boycott the *New York Post*, which they accuse of *bigotry in its news presentation* about Blacks. The paper has gained a reputation as a sleazy tabloid run by white conservative racists who offend not only Blacks, but Hispanics, Asians and native Americans.

And in Washington, D.C., the *Washington Times* has been accused of *bigotry in its news policy toward Blacks*. The *Times* is owned and published by the Unification Church and has gained the reputation of being owned by a bunch of yellow racists and managed by a bunch of white racists.

Black "Metropolitan Life" columnist Adrienne T. Washington encountered the forearm of this moonie paper's racist policy when she delivered her column on the Rodney King verdict. White Managing Editor Wesley Pruden refused to run the angry but truthful article that condemned America as "a nation of bigots." He claimed that the article might be misread as supporting arsonists and looters.

Such excuses act like a magnetic field. Even if Blacks want to believe that the white media is objective, they are forced back into the inevitability of reality. Hence, as African-Americans have always believed, the white media are *still* bigots when they cover news in the Black community.

Figure4. "Further Evidence of White-Media Bigotry: STRONG POINTS" (James Strong/*New Pittsburgh Courier*).[121]

On the other hand, some pieces printed in the Black newspapers of the time go so far as to characterize Asian Americans as being "no better" than whites in the power they wield to oppress Black Americans. James Strong writes in the *New Pittsburgh Courier* on June 27, 1992 about what he calls "white-media bigotry," referring to mass media outlets who engage in white primacy.[122] Here, Strong conforms to the Black-white binary by constantly using the terms "Blacks" and "whites" as stand-ins for "minorities" and "the majority." The focus of the piece is

[120] Ben Chavis, "Reflections from Los Angeles," 2.
[121] James Strong, "Further Evidence of White-Media Bigotry: STRONG POINTS," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, June 27, 1992, 4.
[122] James Strong, "White-Media Bigotry," 4.

on the relationship between the white media and Black consumers, with little regard for other racial minorities. The piece — which argues that "the white-controlled media" is rampant with anti-Black biases that Black Americans must contend with whenever they interact with the mainstream — includes a section where Black and white reporters have accused the *Los Angeles Times* "of bigotry in its news coverage of the Black community" by "[downplaying] stories about racial hostility and potential racial conflict in the Los Angeles area."[123] Reporters then "cite instances in which editors have criticized reporters for taking too seriously Black-Korean problems, have changed words in articles about South Central Los Angeles to tone down statements about Black distrust of whites and had rejected stories suggesting the possibility of race riots."[124] Strong's insinuation here is that the editorial board of this paper was wrong to discourage journalists from advancing the Black-Korean narrative.

Notably, towards the end of the piece, Strong does make another reference to Asian Americans — when he states that the *Washington Times*, alleged to be prejudiced against Black Americans in its news policy and owned by the Korean American Unification Church, "has gained the reputation of being owned by a bunch of yellow racists and managed by a bunch of white racists."[125] Asian Americans are referred to using an openly derogatory remark: "yellow racists." They are seen as existing on the same side as whites, fully aligned with the white normative ideal, and thus are made out to be an enemy in the fight against prejudice. This story, which begins with a discussion of underlying racialized factors that contributed to misleading and inadequate coverage of the riots, ironically proceeds to engage in racialized rhetoric itself when it generalizes Asian Americans as being bigoted or racist against Black communities.

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[123] James Strong, "White-Media Bigotry," 4.
[124] James Strong, "White-Media Bigotry," 4.
[125] James Strong, "White-Media Bigotry," 4.

Gloom Deepens For L.A. Small Black Business

By E. SCOTT RECKARD
Associated Press Writer

EDITOR'S NOTE—This is the first part of a two-part series that looks at how the Los Angeles rioting nearly two months ago has devastated minority merchants. Here's a profile of Black music store owner Robert Johnson.

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Awaiting a small-business loan from the government is like languishing on death row for Robert Johnson, whose uninsured Delicious Records & Tapes burned in the riots nearly two months ago.

"You don't know if today's the day you go to the electric chair or you get a reprieve," Johnson said.

Death imagery dominates his discussions these days. He feels like vultures are circling him and hundreds of other Blacks whose businesses were looted or torched following the April 29 acquittals in the Rodney King police beating trial.

He worries about landlords looking to jack up rents for businesses trying to relocate: "I've got to find a location before I can get the loan money. And they're exploiting that."

He worries about hustlers who say they'll work for him cheap. They say he can show the government loan officials a full-price bill, collect the money and pocket the difference.

He worries about real estate sharpies looking to take advantage of him if he has to unload his one remaining asset: a house in affluent, largely Black Ladera Heights, worth about half a million, at least before the real estate recession.

Now, nearly 30, Johnson may be forced to sell since he's two months behind on his mortgage.

The store had provided a good living, enabling him to send his four daughters to private schools. The youngest is now following her sisters through college.

Delicious Records was looted, then burned when fire spread from a nearby liquor store, which Johnson said was torched because its Japanese-American owners never learned to get along with their customers.

Insurance had always been difficult to obtain and expensive in South Central Los Angeles. Johnson risked going without, a gamble repeated by many other inner-city businesses. A task force, headed by state Insurance Commissioner John Garamendi is looking into reforms to make insurance affordable and available in the inner city.

But all that comes too late for Johnson.

"It's like visiting your parents at the graveyard to me," he said as he ponders the site of his record store, now just smoke-stained concrete walls across Vermont Avenue from a local barbecue landmark, Mr. Jim's.

Johnson figures he'll need months of counseling to work through his mixed emotions.

He can't understand why Blacks would attack a business owned by another Black for 15 years, a store with jazz, soul and blues record so unusual that customers came from Scandinavia, Britain and Japan.

Yet, he understands why Black who have nothing, with prospect for nothing, would get caught u in the looting.

WAITING FOR LOAN—Robert Johnson stands in front of the ruins of his uninsured record store, burned out in the Los Angeles riots. Johnson is one of many Black businessmen who are enduring long, purgatory-like waits for word on their government small-business rebuilding loans.

Figure 5. "Gloom Deepens For L.A. Small Black Business" (Scott E. Reckard/*New Pittsburgh Courier*).[126]

Aside from the explanatory factors for the rioting in L.A., the tone of coverage during the Rodney King verdict and following the riots from these newspapers is one of despair, cynicism, and indignation. One sobering report from August 1, 1992 in the *New Pittsburgh Courier* examines the devastation of minority merchants and the "purgatory-like waits for word on their government small-business rebuilding loans."[127] The article practically drips with worry from its main subject Robert Johnson, who discusses landlords, hustlers, and the future of his business and life. "It's like visiting your parents at the graveyard to me," he says at one point, with the admission that he will likely need months of counseling to process his turbulent emotions.[128] Another piece from the *New Pittsburgh Courier* entitled "Let's Do Our Homework" questions the circumstances under which the Rodney King verdict was decided, as well as the inaction of the L.A. police that "gave the rioting opportunity to gain momentum to spread uncontrollably, to

[126] Scott E. Reckard, "Gloom Deepens for L.A. Small Black Business," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, Aug 1, 1992, 6.
[127] Scott E. Reckard, "Gloom Deepens," 6.
[128] Scott E. Reckard, "Gloom Deepens," 6.

wreak tremendous damage and death throughout the city."[129] The editorial then directs its anger at "the supposed leaders of this country," stating that the tragedy of the rioting "could have been avoided had our leaders done their homework in the sincere interest of the people of this country who are suffering on a daily basis"; it ends with the point that there is "plenty of blame to go around, Black and white, starting with President Bush."[130] Once again, the Black-white binary is affirmed with the exclusion of other racial minorities — suggesting that it is only Black Americans who are grieving and expressing rage at the escalation in South-Central L.A. and the injustices that were permitted.

Racially-motivated injustice is a major target of critiques contained in Black press coverage. Black press, in a sharp rebuke of the mainstream, is far more willing to say the quiet part out loud and call attention to the racialized assumptions that associate Black Americans with criminality and culturally-based inferiority. Herb Boyd writes in the *Amsterdam News* on May 9 of 1992, referring to the Rodney King verdict, that "we are the [them] who have always been locked out or up, pushed aside, neglected and reduced to some sort of dangerous beast" — and "Black America's quest for justice has been fruitless, and justice … seems unable to ever decide in our behalf."[131] A piece by Benjamin F. Chavis Jr. from the June 13 issue of the *New Pittsburgh Courier* in 1992 writes that "the most dangerous and historically long-lasting crisis facing this nation is the unmitigated denial that RACISM is one of the major causative factors that determines massive social and economic inequity and injustice," noting that "King was a victim of RACISM institutionalized in the 'criminal' justice system."[132] A letter to the editor published in the *New Journal and Guide* in 1991, months before the riots, expresses disillusionment with

[129] "Let's Do Our Homework," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, May 23, 1992, 4.
[130] "Let's Do Our Homework," 4.
[131] Herb Boyd, "The Prevailing Image of the Black Man as Beast," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 9, 1992, 6.
[132] Benjamin F. Chavis Jr., "1992: Stop Denying Racism in America," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, June 13, 1992, 4.

American justice, "for America is not a great place to be for Rodney King and others like him."[133] Norm Allen Jr. calls Eurocentrism and white supremacy the root causes of the "Rodney King syndrome," referring to the expectation that "tricky arguments are more important than [people's] own senses and the facts in determining truth."[134] As she tells in a special to the *Amsterdam News* on April 4, 1992, Carolyn Butts fears that "an absence of media scrutiny and public outcry will lessen the chances that King will get justice" — a fear that was then seemingly confirmed with the not-guilty verdict.[135] James Strong in the *New Journal and Guide* mentions offhandedly "the probation given [to] a Los Angeles Korean merchant who shot a black teenager in the back of the head" — referring to the killing of Latasha Harlins — as evidence of an unjust justice system, coupled with the prosecution of the L.A. police officers charged with beating Rodney King.[136] All of these articles are based on the same premise: that U.S. society is not designed with Black Americans in mind. Not only had "the system failed [Black Americans]" in the case of Rodney King, as David Richardson writes in "We Need Not Look Any Further Than California for Racial Injustice," but "the system of justice … has never been on the side of the African-American."[137]

Acceptance and Condonement of Black Hostility Towards Koreans

An unexpected — yet certainly unsurprising — challenge of this content analysis lies in determining whether coverage of Black-Korean relations in these newspapers falls under the

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[133] Barbara C. Robinson, "Rodney King: Proud American?," *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, Mar 20, 1991, 6.
[134] Norm Allen Jr., "OPINION: Eurocentrism, White Supremacy, & the Rodney King Syndrome," *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, June 10, 1992, 2.
[135] Carolyn Butts, "Rodney King Trial is Ignored as Media Focuses on Politics," *New York Amsterdam News*, Apr 4, 1992, 30.
[136] James Strong, "Dealing with Increasing Racial Attacks Against Afro-Americans," *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, Nov 4, 1992, 2.
[137] David P. Richardson, "We Need Not Look Any Further Than California for Racial Injustice: OPINION EDITORIAL," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, May 23, 1992, 5.

umbrella of L.A. riots coverage, given that many of these articles speak to the tensions that exist in the cities these newspapers were based in, rather than L.A. itself. Regardless, I argue that the rhetorical strategies employed and the news framing of all Black-Korean relations, whether in L.A. or not, inform our understanding of how the L.A. riots were being perceived by these communities. This is because the mainstream media presented the riots in South-Central L.A. as though they were wholly caused by the animosities possessed between Black Americans and Korean Americans in their shared neighborhoods. As discussed earlier, with no reporters on the ground to say otherwise, many Black Americans in other parts of the country, and the Black newspapers who represented them, were forced to accept this premise as fact.[138] Thus, how Black-Korean relations are discussed by these papers can offer academic insight into the intimacies of Black emotional responses to the riots — especially given that virtually no articles analyzed for this chapter ever overtly countered or denied the Black-Korean narrative proposed and affirmed by mainstream media sources.

Coverage of Black-Korean relations as it relates to the 1992 L.A. riots views Black-Korean harmony as a tall order — something that is nearly impossible to achieve when factoring in the decades of built-up resentment between both communities. Black journalists and writers for these establishments range from ambivalent to outright hostile towards Korean American identity, treating the Korean American community with immediate skepticism and doubting their intentions. I argue that there is also a widespread belief across these newspapers that Korean Americans hold prejudiced beliefs against Black Americans, which in turn generates resentment and frustration among the Black public sphere. Whether all Korean Americans actually saw Black Americans as beneath them is unclear; it seems unreasonable to assume that all Korean Americans unambiguously felt this way, yet it is true that such sentiments easily arose

[138] Catherine R. Squires, *African Americans and the Media.*

due to the close proximity of the two communities, which evidently possess many cultural differences. What *is* clear, however, is that this framing of Black Americans and Korean Americans as being irreconcilably different — and consequently diametrically opposed — seeps into affective understandings of such relations, and reinforces such tensions to begin with. Mainstream media coverage, in perpetuating the Black-Korean conflict frame, convinced the affected communities themselves of this frame's ubiquity, which then was further strengthened by discourse within the counterpublic space. The blame — if one can truly lay blame on any one actor — thus does not lie with the Black public sphere itself, but with the dominant ideologies that members of that space were encouraged to adopt. When Black Americans are primed to mistrust and actively despise Korean Americans, and then they reprint such sentiments in the media they produce, one should not be surprised to see that relations between the two would only continue to worsen.

Black-Korean relations, as presented in the Black press, are far from agreeable. In the "FROM OUR READERS" section of the May 20, 1992 edition of the *New Journal and Guide*, reader Reverend James L. L. Burrell makes the sweeping generalization that "America trains the Black man to fight the Korean war, [and] the Koreans come here to America and open businesses in the Black community to make their living off the Black community."[139] An article in the *New Pittsburgh Courier* about the rioting from the perspective of Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan includes a moment when Farrakhan "[implores] Blacks to get involved in economic self-reliance, citing as an example two Korean businessmen who were burned out during the rioting in Los Angeles."[140] In his words, Black Americans "could not set up a shop in Korean Town and take money from their community," but "everybody can set up shop in [Black

[139] James L. L. Burrell, "FROM OUR READERS: Afro-Americans are Tired of Being Used by America," *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, May 20, 1992, 2.
[140] "'You Could Not Set Up Shop in Korean Town'—Farrakhan," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, May 23, 1992, 1.

Americans'] community."[141] What this rhetoric does is further cement the idea that Korean American merchants were going into Black neighborhoods with the intention of stripping its people of their wealth; the solution, then, is to shut them out completely. Generally, this analysis finds that feelings of animosity towards Korean American merchants stem from the idea that the Black community is being exploited, as money is taken from the hands of Black Americans and funneled into Korean American neighborhoods — thus contributing to the myth of diametric opposition between these groups. Such ideologies present in the Black community, as expressed in this coverage, make it all the more difficult to envision a future in which the interests of both are aligned, and networks of trust can be constructed.

Even before the riots, the *Amsterdam News*, the *New Journal and Guide*, and the *New Pittsburgh Courier* include pieces that speak to moments of tension between the two communities across the country. Latasha Harlins' death is alluded to frequently, though often not by name. The only articles found in the content analysis of these three papers that do mention Latasha Harlins or Soon Da Ju by name are ones printed in the *New Pittsburgh Courier* and authored by Associated Press writers. One, written by James E. Anderson, describes the boiling of tensions in South-Central L.A. and offers sympathetic and nuanced coverage of both Black American and Korean American subjects, naming reasons for suspicion and resentment on both sides in addition to moves towards reconciliation.[142] Another, by Deborah Hastings from January of 1993, details the dissolution of the L.A. Black-Korean Alliance, meant to bridge "two warring ethnic populations."[143] She argues that "the Black-Korean Alliance apparently had accomplished precious little in six years of meetings," exacerbated by hostilities and lack of funding.[144]

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[141] "'You Could Not'—Farrakhan," 1.
[142] James E. Anderson, "Tension Between Blacks, Koreans Boil in South Central L.A.," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, Dec 14, 1991, 9.
[143] Deborah Hastings, "Black-Korean Alliance in Los Angeles Fails," *New Pittsburgh Courier,* Jan 9, 1993, 6.
[144] Deborah Hastings, "Black-Korean Alliance," 6.

As for articles written by journalists for the Black press, one piece from 1991 by Vinette Pryce covers a Brooklyn-based political movement to boycott Korean American merchants on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Here, Soon Ja Du's killing of Latasha Harlins is mentioned as "a young Black woman [being] shot in the back by a Korean woman who was furious because the woman left the store without purchasing a carton of orange juice."[145] The report speaks on the denouncement of the light ruling that Du received from Ice Cube, whose message "has raised the consciousness of many Blacks who share his observations and in particular those who believe Koreans have adopted the prejudices of whites."[146] This phrase underscores a point articulated in the previous section: that Korean Americans were regarded as siding with dominant white society, and in some respects were just as bad — if not worse — than white racists.

Korean leader frustrated at lack of cooperation between Koreans, Blacks

By LESTER HINDS
Special to the AmNews

The president of the Korean Association of New York, Dr. Jae Taik-Lim, has expressed frustration at the lack of responsiveness by both African-Americans and Koreans in developing programs to improve relations between the two ethnic groups.

Taik-Lim, who took over as president of the Korean Association last year, had announced an ambitious program, including joint ventures between Koreans and African-Americans, which he said would go some way towards improving relations between the two groups.

"All I get is talk, but no one seems committed to getting things moving," said Taik-Lim.

"We in the association have so many ideas which will improve relations between the two groups, but we are not getting anywhere. Everything seems to be still at the talking stage," Taik-Lim said in noticeable frustration.

He said that a proposal to start the teaching of self-defense to youths in a center in Queens is yet to get off the ground, although the instructors are ready to go and the center is available.

Taik-Lim said that he had also requested from City Hall the proposals that were developed last year to improve relations between Koreans and African-Americans but has yet to receive a copy of the proposal.

"We are not getting the cooperation we were promised by both Korean and African-Americans," he said.

Relations between African-Americans hit a low level following an incident at a Korean store in Brooklyn in 1990, which led to Blacks boycotting two specific stores on Church Ave. The boycot lasted over a year.

The boycott was resolved in court with the acquittal of a Korean employee accused of assaulting a Black woman, but a civil suit brought on by the woman is still pending.

Following the flare-up, Korean and African-American leaders resolved to find ways to ease tensions and bring harmony between the two groups.

Among the ideas tossed around at the time were the hiring of Blacks in Korean businesses and Koreans giving back something to the community in which they operate.

Taik-Lim said that despite the present lack of cooperation, he was pushing ahead with his proposals. Hopefully he will begin to get the promised cooperation from both communities.

Figure 6. "Korean Leader Frustrated at Lack of Cooperation Between Koreans, Blacks" (Lester Hinds/*New York Amsterdam News*).[147]

[145] Vinette K. Pryce, "Carson and 'Blackwatch' to Boycott Koreans on MLK Day," *New York Amsterdam News*, Dec 28, 1991, 4.
[146] Vinette K. Pryce, "MLK Day," 30.
[147] Lester Hinds, "Korean Leader Frustrated at Lack of Cooperation Between Koreans, Blacks," *New York Amsterdam News*, Nov 28, 1992, 4.

Not all coverage frames Korean Americans as such, of course — given that counterpublics engage in a wide variety of viewpoints and perspectives from their respective community. Lester Hinds writes in the *Amsterdam News* about the president of the Korean Association of New York, who has expressed frustration at "the lack of responsiveness by both African-Americans and Koreans in developing programs to improve relations between the two groups."[148] This is a report on the news side of the paper that is sympathetic towards Korean Americans — a rarity in Black press coverage. Statements about the Flatbush boycott of 1990 are kept neutral with no traceable judgment, with a note that "Korean and African-American leaders resolved to find ways to ease tensions and bring harmony between the two groups."[149] A similar article by Lester Hinds, published five months earlier, details the "establishment of a technical cooperative training institute in Harlem, one of many ideas designed to improve relations between Blacks and Koreans" and announced by that same president of the Korean Association of New York.[150] This article quotes the president, Jae Taik Kim, as calling for the peaceful sensitizing of each other's cultures. Interestingly, though the article is written in a manner that assumes a position of neutrality and objectivity, there is no discussion of Black animosity towards Korean Americans — only vice versa. Kim, for instance, vehemently denies the existence of a general Black-Korean conflict, but misunderstandings between the two are instead attributed to "Koreans [who] do not understand the Black struggle for political, social and economic justice."[151] Note here that no mention is given of a Black American misunderstanding of Korean American positionality; the impetus is placed on Korean Americans to change their perspectives, but not the other way around. This absence of commentary on ways

[148] Lester Hinds, "Korean Leader Frustrated," 4.
[149] Lester Hinds, "Korean Leader Frustrated," 4.
[150] Lester Hinds, "Korean Group Plans to Build Bridges Between Blacks and Koreans," *New York Amsterdam News*, June 20, 1992, 3.
[151] Lester Hinds, "Korean Group Plans," 38.

for Black Americans to reach across the aisle for an ongoing effort towards racial harmony may be due to the report's nearly sole focus on Jae Taik Kim, a Korean American, and not representative of the Black community — but its lack is felt nevertheless.

It is hard to discuss coverage of Black-Korean relations in the Black press without talking about James Strong; indeed, his presence is felt across all three newspapers, through a recurring opinion column labeled "STRONG POINTS" in the *New Pittsburgh Courier* and through published articles in the other two papers. So: who is James Strong? He is a writer and journalist who, according to his website, "has more than 35 years in print, broadcast and electronic media."[152] Indeed, James Strong is not just a one-off columnist for one particular Black press outlet; rather, he was a syndicated columnist for several Black newspapers during the time of the L.A. riots. All three newspapers covered in this chapter feature the "STRONG POINTS" column in some capacity; it was not only published in these three, but also in other Black newspapers like the *Arizona Informant*, the *Birmingham Times*, the *Eagle News*, and *Speakin' Out News*.[153] I argue that this inclusion of his authorship across many newspapers suggests that his voice was respected enough within the Black community so as to have nationwide appeal and reach.

Many of the conclusions drawn in this chapter are sourced in large part from James Strong — a potential limitation of this analysis — because of just how frequently he dedicated his writings to Black-Korean relations in the wake of the L.A. riots. His view of the Korean American community as a problem for Black Americans is almost palpable in its tone and language. One opinion piece puts it rather succinctly in its title: "Black America's Korean Problem." Published on December 21, 1991, half a year before the riots, Strong calls the "Korean problem" the "unwarranted or unwanted encroachment by Korean businessowners into

[152] James Strong, "Philosophy and Brief History of *Strong Points*," *Strong Points*, https://www.strongpointsonline.com/about.
[153] James Strong, "Philosophy and Brief History."

the Black community."[154] This problem, then, manifests itself through the "proliferation of Korean-owned businesses in poor Black neighborhoods," as well as the "disrespect some Korean merchants have shown their Black customers."[155] He qualifies that Black Americans are partially responsible for the development of this issue by permitting Korean store owners to open shops in their communities — implicitly suggesting that they should not have been allowed to do so — before providing a bulleted list of "tactical methods" to remedy the problem by addressing one or both of the two manifestations.[156] These solutions include restricting the number of Korean-owned businesses in Black neighborhoods, partnering with Korean investors for joint ventures, and supporting Black entrepreneurs — but, among boycotting disrespectful Korean-owned businesses and expelling disrespectful Korean American merchants, also prescribe "harassing" and "attacking" disrespectful these merchants.[157] The suggestion of physical retaliation is not given without warning that this is a "sometimes harsh" method to employ, but it still highlights the fraught nature of conceptualizing ways to mitigate tensions without resorting to violence. Though Strong does lament that a recent string of Black-Korean incidents in L.A. have turned "what can be a warm relationship into constant frigid encounters," it is hard to imagine that Black Americans attacking Korean American members of South-Central L.A., even if it is to "halt the disrespect some Korean merchants show African-Americans," would be fruitful in easing such tensions.[158]

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[154] James Strong, "Black America's Korean Problem: STRONG POINTS," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, Dec 21, 1991, 4.
[155] James Strong, "Black America's Korean Problem," 4.
[156] James Strong, "Black America's Korean Problem," 4.
[157] James Strong, "Black America's Korean Problem," 4.
[158] James Strong, "Black America's Korean Problem," 4.

The problems between Blacks and Koreans..

By James Strong
Strong Points

After 12 years of republican rule, most Americans agree that George Bush and Ronald Reagan left the country in economic, moral and racial shambles.

Economically, America has endured two recessions, the collapse of the saving and loan industry, bankruptcies by some of the world's largest companies and massive worker layoffs.

Morally, we have seen two presidents so ethically gangrened that in many conservative circles right means wrong and wrong means right.

Racially, the garrison of racial tolerance that once marched toward black/white unity in the 1970s has retreated to a thickly fortified bunker of mistrust and hate in the 1990s.

In fact, if we focus on the racial problems for a minute, the racial climate is so cold and so hazardous that it has no longer just frozen black/white relations, but black/Hispanic and black/Chinese and black/Vietnamese relations as well.

No situation, however, so pinpoints the country's racial turmoil as that between blacks and Koreans. The probation given last year to the Los Angeles Korean storeowner who shot a black teenager in the back of the head showed just how much blacks believe many Koreans are nothing more than yellownecks supplanting rednecks.

In Washington, D.C., blacks constantly denounce the city's only right-wing daily newspaper, The Washington Times. The paper is owned by the Rev. Moon's Unification Church, though managed by mainly by right-wing whites. The moonies use the paper to publish a stream- a dirty, polluted stream - of anti-black venom, as well as the usual right-wing lies concerning society, politics and religion.

Many black Washingtonians now honorably refer to the paper as owned by yellownecks and managed by rednecks.

In New York, the boycott by blacks a few years ago of a Korean grocery store because the Korean storekeeper assaulted an elderly Haitian woman crippled almost any possibility of sustained harmonious black/Korean relations not only locally, but also nationally.

And despite attempts by such black scum as Congress of Racial Equality Executive Director Roy Innis to rally support for the owner of the boycotted grocery, blacks in New York and elsewhere have refused to sanction the right of Koreans who do not respect black cultural values to operate businesses in black communities.

In Los Angeles, all the years of black frustration over Korean racism gathered into a single storm and changed into a hurricane of rioting, violence and retaliation after the acquittal of the four white police officers who beat Rodney King.

With more than 2,000 Korean businesses burned, looted and destroyed in the aftermath, Korean business owners realized that many blacks were not going to sit back and let nonviolent blacks use nonviolence as a means to safeguard Korean racism. Indeed, blacks should always maintain such a view.

Strength, not pacifism, should rule black policy toward Koreans who are racists. In fact, to combat Korean racism, blacks should mix in their bowl an ounce of negotiation, a tablespoon of boycotting and a teaspoonful of scuffles and skirmishes.

Only such a whole policy as that will help ensure black control over their own communities.

Figure 7. "The Problems Between Blacks and Koreans.." (James Strong/*Norfolk New Journal and Guide*).[159]

Another article by James Strong, entitled "The Problems Between Blacks and Koreans..", is perhaps the most overt in its language. Written almost a year after the riots, he begins by pointing to the racial climate of the 1990s, arguing that not only are Black-white relations frozen, but Black-Korean relations pinpoint the country's racial turmoil. He points to the probation sentence given to Soon Ja Du, though he refers to the situation only as "the Los Angeles Korean storeowner who shot a black teenager in the back of the head," as proof that "Koreans are nothing more than yellownecks supplanting rednecks."[160] Strong proceeds to name grievances held by the Black community against Korean Americans; for instance, he details the *Washington Times* and "moonies … [publishing] anti-black venom, as well as the usual right-wing lies," and again declares that "many black Washingtonians now honorably refer to the paper as owned by

[159] James Strong, "The Problems Between Blacks and Koreans..," *New Journal and Guide*, Apr 14, 1993, 2.
[160] James Strong, "The Problems Between," 2.

yellownecks and managed by rednecks."[161] James Strong, mentioned earlier for his use of the term "yellow racists," once again uses the color "yellow" to negatively refer to Korean Americans as a new and equally bad variant of individual-level racism.

The opinion piece is caustic in its tone; its affective message finds its power in the clear frustration, bordering on rage, that Strong finds in Black mistreatment at the hands of Korean American business owners. He frames the L.A. riots as a storm built upon "all the years of black frustration over Korean racism," one that taught Korean American merchants that "many blacks were not going to sit back and let nonviolent blacks use nonviolence as a means to safeguard Korean racism."[162] Here, Strong justifies the property damage and extensive destruction of Korean American businesses during the riots as one of satisfying vengeance for a long pattern of exploitation, but most importantly of prejudice: it is seen as a comeuppance, rather than a tragedy. The framing applauds Black demonstrators for targeting Korean American stores, even implicitly disapproving of nonviolent Black Americans whose nonviolence made them weak and enabled the continuation of Korean racism. Strong ends the piece by arguing that it is the principle of strength, not pacifism, that "should rule black policy towards Koreans who are racists."[163] "To combat Korean racism," he writes, "blacks should mix in their bowl an ounce of negotiation, a tablespoon of boycotting and a teaspoonful of scuffles and skirmishes."[164] Physical retaliation for racist slights is seen as empowering Black Americans to take back "control over their own communities," as Black neighborhoods are characterized here as falling victim to the tyranny of Korean American businesses.[165]

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[161] James Strong, "The Problems Between," 2.
[162] James Strong, "The Problems Between," 2.
[163] James Strong, "The Problems Between," 2.
[164] James Strong, "The Problems Between," 2.
[165] James Strong, "The Problems Between," 2.

This language is, of course, extreme in its distaste for Korean Americans as they relate to and interact with Black American communities. Though there is one point where Strong identifies the enemy as "Koreans who are racists," much of the rhetoric employed — namely, the term "Korean racism" — makes it seem as though *all* Koreans engage in racism, leading to a generalization that demonizes the Korean American identity itself. Alongside phrasing like the "Korean problem," the implication could not be more clear: Korean Americans are a hassle to deal with, not an equal partner in the fight against marginalization and oppression.

James Strong is, as is key to remember, just one man; he is far from representative of all Black Americans, and the fact that he writes a disproportionate amount of coverage on Black-Korean relations may skew such findings. But "STRONG POINTS" and the subjectivities that column imbues into the narrative of Black-Korean interminority tensions are relevant because they underscore the extent to which the Black public sphere did not understand the perspectives of Korean Americans encroaching on their spaces. Language like "yellownecks," and the condonement of violence, would have been condemned and harshly rebuked across the board in most other newspapers; Strong never issued an apology for his remarks and continued to write for Black press outlets for many years, suggesting his statements were not seen as flagrant enough to warrant reprimand. Even Strong's presence in the press in the years following the conclusion of the riots indicates that, though perhaps to the extreme, this was not necessarily an aberrant viewpoint to have within the Black community. Once again, this emphasizes that ethnic media, as an affective racial counterpublic and an arm of the Black public sphere, allowed internalized, more intimate discourse that was not as heavily scrutinized by dominant society — even if this discourse would have been deemed unacceptable in mainstream circles.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I find that Black journalists, writing for Black audiences in Black-centric newspapers, expressed a myriad of sentiments regarding the 1992 L.A. riots — many of which directly opposed mainstream broadcast coverage, and some of which accepted and conformed to dominant news framing devices. In fact, the Black press at times took such framings of Black-Korean relations even further than mass media outlets would dare to go, with opinion pieces and editorial slants that actively and openly denigrated Korean Americans for, in some opinions, intruding on Black neighborhoods and streets. Primarily, whereas Korean Americans were freshly exposed to the failings of the American Dream through the rioting and lack of institutional support, as will be elaborated upon in the following chapter, this realization had come long before the 1990s for Black Americans, who have suffered under a racial hierarchy that has placed them at the bottom rungs of society. Framing of the rioting and its causes is explicit in calling out poverty as the result of a rigged system, leading to crime and other undesirable consequences, as well as racial injustice and routine mistreatment of Black Americans by biased white-dominated law enforcement agencies and the media institutions eager to protect them.

Yet the Black press did not see Korean Americans as languishing under the same conditions of institutional racism and economic despair that Black Americans experienced, nor did they recognize the humanity of Korean American merchants. Framing of race relations imagined the state of U.S. society through a Black-white binary that excluded other minority voices — and when Asian Americans *were* included in such theoretical frameworks, it was almost always as more similar to white populations than other racial minorities, as a result of their shared anti-Black racism and the Model Minority Myth. Not all writers for the Black press

were critical of Black-Korean relations. For every James Strong, there is a Herb Boyd — who wrote a piece in 1988 for the *Amsterdam News* about "finding common ground in the Black-Korean conflict." What this chapter demonstrates is, above all else, the complexity of sentiments surrounding race, interminority race relations, and racial triangulation. There are, of course, no easy answers — and the Black public sphere seems to recognize this.

Chapter 3: "They Left Us to Burn"

We saw our dreams burned for no reason

By Eul Young Yu

Korean Americans are shocked and dismayed. We are shocked because we did not know that what happened in Los Angles last week could happen in this country. We came to this country with a dream to build a new and better life: waking up in early morning hours, putting in 14 hours a day, going to bed at midnight, six to seven days a week, without a vacation for years so that we could send our kids to college to fulfill that dream. We built our homes, our businesses and our town with tears and toil. We transformed a rundown section of the center city into the booming Koreatown, full of life, enthusiasm and hope.

Last week, we saw our lifelong dreams ransacked and burned down for no reason. We saw a complete destruction of humanity. Was there no ethic, no morality, no responsibility, no human dignity among those people who looted and burned our property, livelihood and dreams? We saw children, teenagers, men, women and the elderly turn into mobs. Some people said it was class warfare. But these children are too young to be class-conscious. Some others said it was a race war. But we saw all colors among the looters, and the burned-down shops had no color.

Where was our mayor, our police chief, our governor, our President when innocent citizens and shopkeepers were under siege on the TV screen for hours and hours and days and days? Our leaders are out of touch. Get out of your limousines, take the RTD and ride through Koreatown and South-Central. Live with the real people.

It was a total breakdown of humanity, civility, the system. We are all responsible, you and I. It was our system that failed. The system failed to protect us, did not educate our children right, did not provide help when needed. The system left us in anarchy for three horrifying days.

By Wednesday evening (April 29), we knew the mobs would soon reach Koreatown. Desperate calls for help to city authorities were not answered. Koreatown leaders thought they had many friends in city hall as they gave generously to their campaign coffers. At the time of crisis, no one provided us with police protection. We had to stand alone in times of danger. Don't talk about the National Guard being held up because of an ammunition delay. That is ridiculous. Some veteran groups wanted to arm themselves in order to defend the town. Community leaders pleaded not to, that it would not be a right thing to do. Police handcuffed some armed defenders faced down on the ground, while letting looters go.

On TV screens the scenes of armed Koreans defending their property were shown again and again. Some of them were seen aiming at would-be attackers. The attacking mobs were not shown. Why? The defenders were portrayed by the mainstream media, particularly KABC, as gun-toting hoodlums. They just wanted to scare away the mobs. While Koreans were desperately calling for help, hosts and guests on TV talk shows were framing the black/Korean conflict as the main cause of the riot. Like our leaders, editors and reporters of the mainstream media are out of touch, insensitive and seemingly uncaring.

We feel under siege by police, news media and mobs, and have never felt so betrayed, helpless and lonely.

The three-day madness in Los Angeles has nothing to do with us Korean Americans. It was a violent explosion of anger accumulated over centuries of frustration, helplessness and alienation of the people of color in this country. The Los Angeles experience of the past several days shows that our system, one based on the dominant Eurocentric ideology—one that puts Eurocentric civilization above all others—is not working. From the experience of the 1965 Watts riot, many learned minds predicted a repeat unless the pre-riot conditions improved drastically. The dominant ideology said that there was nothing wrong with the system. The explosion was waiting. The conditions will not improve unless the dominant group opens its mind and treats the people of color and their institutions and culture as equal and decent.

It is unfair for the media and public officials to shift the focus of the current jolt to the black/Korean issue. Many Koreans got hurt because they happened to be near the scene of the explosions. Yes, there are problems between Koreans and blacks, and we need to improve our relationship and learn to live together in peace. But these mobs were not targeting us alone. The media never show the total picture.

We are equally shocked by the verdict on the Rodney King beating and stand in unity with the black community on the issue. Something is very wrong with the judicial system as far as justice for the people of color is concerned. Many of us feel that justice was not served in Soon Ja Du's verdict, either. We understand the anger and frustration expressed by the black community on these events.

But we also want you to know that since Jan. 1, 1990, at least 25 Korean American merchants have been killed by non-Korean gunmen. Most of the merchants had been held up at gunpoint more than once.

We have no apologies to looters and arsonists who have mutilated our property and town. We do not apologize for years of hard work. Violence will not bring the needed change. We must educate our children to grow to be decent and responsible human beings and we must organize ourselves better, or we will not be able to change the status quo.

We have survived extreme oppression ourselves. We have survived the colonial atrocities, World War II and the Korean War. We will not leave Koreatown. We will rise again and rebuild the city. They took away our property but we still have our hopes and dreams. This time we want to rise with all groups, and together make this city a better place to live for all of us.

Eul Young Yu is a sociology professor at Cal State Los Angeles and chair of the Koreatown Emergency Relief Committee. His commentary appeared in the May 5 issue of the *Los Angeles Times*.

Many of us feel that justice was not served in Soon Ja Du's verdict, either... But we also want you to know that since Jan. 1, 1990, at least 25 Korean American merchants have been killed by non-Korean gunmen. Most of the merchants had been held up at gunpoint more than once.

Figure 8. "We Saw Our Dreams Burned for No Reason" (Eul Young Yu/*Korea Times English Edition*).[166]

> *"I truly thought I was a part of mainstream society. Nothing in my life indicated I was a secondary citizen until the L.A. riots. The LAPD powers that be decided to protect the 'haves' and the Korean community did not have any political voice or power.* ***They left us to burn.****"*
>
> - *Chang Lee, Korean American gas station owner during the L.A. Riots*[167]

What do you do when violence comes knocking at your door? What are your priorities? Who do you turn to when tragedy strikes your business, your neighbor's business, your loved one's physical well-being? How do you navigate the uncertain terrain of your frightened local community, marred with grief and the loss of collective capital? If you are a journalist or writer for a minority press outlet representing said affected community, the answer is simple: you write.

[166] Eul Young Yu, "We Saw Our Dreams Burned for No Reason," *Korea Times English Edition*, May 11, 1992, 6.
[167] Kyung Lah, "Rude Awakening."

Hubs for self-representation are paramount to give minority and marginalized groups a formalized avenue for communication that they feel captures their experiences during instances of distorted coverage in the mainstream. A testimony before the Assembly Special Committee on the Los Angeles Crisis presented by Sophia Kyung Kim, assignment editor of the *Korea Times English Edition* (KTEE) during the riots, puts it best when she says that Korean Americans need to feel like they have access to the media: a way to feel as though their voices are being heard.[168] Not only was it imperative that Korean Americans in L.A. have channels for internal and more intimate dialogues amongst themselves through their newspapers, but Korean-language media also served as a platform through which the community could make targeted appeals — and, at times, direct and pointed critiques — to mass media, public servants and officials, and institutionalized barriers to aid and assistance that were exposed during the riots themselves. KTEE, for instance, specifically spoke to the mainstream at times during the 1992 L.A. riots and in the direct aftermath, benefitting from the close ties they shared with the Korean American ethnic community in that city to spread their messages and pleas for help.

The *Korea Times* and Korean-language papers like it serve as representatives of Korean American interests, their positions made more legitimate through their status as journalistic enterprises. Whereas a blog or an individual public figure may face allegations and accusations of being too emotional, non-partisan newspapers are regarded as more distanced from these personalized sentiments. They are a platform through which such emotions can be expressed, but are not in themselves emotional. This is not to say, of course, that minority newspapers never have an agenda, political or otherwise. In fact, it is just the opposite: these newspapers often emphasize their desires to spread awareness and draw more attention to the issues faced by their

[168] Sophia Kyung Kim, "From a Reporter's Point of View: The Ethnic Media's Role in the L.A. Riots," *Korea Times English Edition*, Aug 10, 1992, 6.

respective communities. “It has been our editorial priority,” Kim says at one point during her testimony, “to put human faces on the some 2,300 faceless and nameless Korean American victims of the riots.”[169]

In this chapter, I argue that by conceptualizing these minority press outlets as affective racial counterpublics, like we did the Black public sphere, we can gain further insight into how Korean Americans, based in L.A. and beyond, made sense of their situations — specifically, the exposure of just how fragile their newfound success as “hardworking immigrants” was. Whereas the previous chapter examined national attitudes about riots taking place in a very specific location, this chapter looks expressly at the experiences of one local media station in representing the thoughts and feelings of its marginalized people — not a collective identity, but a geographically constrained one. The riots themselves worked as an instigating event for the formation of Korean American identity centered around Los Angeles, forged in the crucible of shared trauma and a sense of helplessness that mobilized broader networks of Asian American political activism. Only by realizing that the American Dream many had believed so firmly for so long was a lie propagated by white America were Korean Americans able to articulate broader frustrations with the state of U.S. society, and their precarious position within the racial hierarchy. Whether coming from Korean American academics and those well-integrated into mainstream institutions, or Korean American residents with limited English proficiency skills and little to no connections beyond L.A.’s Koreatown, the voices presented by the *Korea Times* were able to recognize that their anger and sorrow was not solely aimed at the rioters and those directly responsible for the destruction of their shops and streets, but at the more abstract causes of such rioting to begin with.

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[169] Sophia Kyung Kim, “The Ethnic Media’s Role,” 6.

Korean Voices of the Riots

The 1992 L.A. riots led to a new construction of Korean American identity, distinct from what had come before through its incorporation of violence and shared trauma into the framework of such racialized associations; when Korean American identity was imagined in the aftermath of the riots, tragedy and pessimism were central to its conception. Min Hyoung Song writes about the tropes of the riots, arguing that "they lead us to a particular vision of the future that is replete with uncontrollable change, social disorder, and wholesale violence."[170] Before the riots, she asserts, Korean American identity was "inchoate in its development at best."[171] Rose Kim adds to this academic dialogue five years later when she says that Korean Americans before 1992, most of whom were first-generation immigrants, did not imagine themselves in racialized terms because Korea itself was "a homogeneous society where identity traditionally had been centred on nationhood."[172] After the riots, however, Korean Americans became more cognizant of such racial perceptions and began to understand the targeting of Korean store owners during the riots as the consequence of anti-Asian prejudice and racism.[173]

Omi and Winant state that race as it continues to affect political life in the U.S. is inherently imbued with violence and violent subjectivities; racial formation is far from a smooth process, and instead is best regarded as a process whose meaning is constantly contested.[174] Just as slavery worked to socially construct a Black American identity that is distinguished from an African identity because of its unique cultural trauma, Korean Americans — to a lesser extent — had their identity informed by the trauma endured by the L.A. community, which not only had real physical consequences on the material success of Korean American L.A. residents, but also

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[170] Min Hyoung Song, *Strange Future: Pessimism and the 1992 Los Angeles Riots* (Duke University Press, 2005), 3.
[171] Min Hyoung Song, *Strange Future*, 137.
[172] Rose Kim, "Violence and Trauma," 2001.
[173] Rose Kim, "Violence and Trauma."
[174] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States.*

exposed the vulnerability and fragility of Korean American racial positionality as protected (or not protected) by U.S. institutions.[175] These may be intangible consequences, but hold just as much sway and influence on the cultural imaginary as property damage and loss of life: they speak to the uncovering of different social standpoints.

Asian American newspaper coverage of the L.A. riots is an area of research that has gone largely untapped, with some exceptions for scholars like Hemant Shah and Michael Thornton. They look at five Asian American newspapers, including the *Korea Times* but also papers like *AsianWeek* and *India-West*, and find that articles in all explain why the riots happen, broadly, using three categories: individual, institutional, and structural.[176] Once again, it is confirmed that the Asian American diaspora is far from monolithic in their interpretations of the riots; the coverage ranges from depicting Black residents of L.A. as destructive and greedy, to claiming that Black-Korean tensions are a symptom of a larger Black-white problem, to directing anger towards economic exploitation and poverty. Significantly, Shah and Thornton find that the coverage frames "the consequences of the rioting and disturbances in the context of solutions proposed to avoid similar situations in the future," as a way to continue to "strive for the 'American Dream.'"[177] Though revolutionary in its incorporation of many more viewpoints than did other presses of the day, Asian American newspapers express that the riots were "ultimately about how one group, mainly Korean Americans, got caught up in a conflict between two others, Blacks and Whites" — both absolving them of any responsibility in the flaring of Black-Korean tensions, and still subscribing to a faith in the American Dream.[178] Asian Americans were "surprised to find that they were not considered part of the larger (White) community."[179] This

[175] Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); Min Hyoung Song, *Strange Future*.
[176] Hemant Shah and Michael C. Thornton, *Newspaper Coverage of Interethnic Conflict.*
[177] Hemant Shah and Michael C. Thornton, *Newspaper Coverage of Interethnic Conflict*, 214.
[178] Hemant Shah and Michael C. Thornton, *Newspaper Coverage of Interethnic Conflict*, 217.
[179] Hemant Shah and Michael C. Thornton, *Newspaper Coverage of Interethnic Conflict*. 217.

disappointed Asian Americans, and led to the understanding that they would have to insert themselves further into the political conversation by becoming politically active to prevent occurrences like this in the future.

Rose Kim highlights that the 1992 L.A. riots are so hotly contested even today that they go by many names; the event is "simultaneously called a riot, an unrest, an uprising, and insurrection, and a rebellion."[180] Furthermore, Korean Americans refer to it as "Sa-i-gu," translating to "4-2-9," taken from April 29, 1992, the first day of the riots.[181] Such flexibility in how the event is defined indicates that there is still a level of uncertainty to the riots' perception and legacy, even decades after its conclusion. Yet Korean Americans remain convinced that the L.A. riots had a long-lasting effect on the bonds sustained within their community. Richard Choi, veteran broadcaster of the L.A. station Radio Korea, recalls his time servicing Koreatown during the riots as a navigator, interpreter of events, distributor of riots-related information, and crisis counselor.[182] In an interview with *LAist*, he says:

> "Up until that point, Koreans were just merely living in the U.S. There was no sense or identity of being Korean American. And although what happened in 1992 was heart-wrenching and really sad, what happened was that these Koreans who were merely living in the U.S. started becoming Korean Americans. We started seeing the identity of the Korean American be born and formed."[183]

Other Korean Americans interviewed about their experiential and interpretive efforts after the riots concur with this sentiment. Importantly, Korean American interviewees who spoke with John Lie and Nancy Abelmann frequently resisted media representations of Korean

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[180] Rose Kim, "Violence and Trauma," 2006.
[181] Claire Wang, "30 Years After 'Saigu': Korean Americans Reckon with L.A.'s Past on Anniversary of Riots," *NBC News*, Apr 28, 2022, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/30-years-saigu-korean-americans-reckon-ls-anniversary-riots-rcna26118.
[182] Josie Huang, "30 Years Ago, He Talked Koreatown Through the Unrest of '92," *LAist*, Apr 29, 2022, https://laist.com/news/92-unrest-uprisings-radio-korea-koreatown.
[183] Josie Huang, "30 Years Ago."

American presence in the riots, ranging from "the individual images of gun-toting vigilantes to the overall focus on the Black-Korean conflict."[184] Many dismissed the existence of the Black-Korean conflict altogether, either viewing it as a media fabrication or a grotesque exaggeration.

How much of this outright rejection of the Black-Korean conflict's influence on the riots is based in reality, or an attempt to sanitize and make the Korean American community look better, is up for debate. As evidenced by the previous chapter, Black press outlets during this time did not shy away from characterizing Korean Americans as rude, unfriendly, or bigoted; given this widespread perception of the Korean American community, there is presumably some element of truth to this, however slight. And it is evident that the proliferation of Korean-owned small businesses in Black residential areas during the 1980s and 1990s certainly exacerbated tensions between these two communities, as a result of cultural clashes and difficulties in communication that intensified antagonism and, at times, volatile relations.[185] Edward Chang writes in a retrospective piece that Korean American homicide rates "seemed to increase dramatically" during the height of such tensions in L.A. between 1991 and 1992, then "began to trickle off after the LA Riots" — implying that some level of Black-Korean animosity did in fact contribute to outbursts of violence, whether racially motivated or not.[186] But regardless of whether the denial of the Black-Korean conflict was an accurate assessment of interminority race relations at the time, what *is* clear is that Korean Americans viewed media representations of their community as unfair and distorted. This, then, opened up new possibilities for ethnic media, specifically Korean-language media, to fill this gap. Not only could Korean-language media

[184] Nancy Abelmann and John Lie, "The 'Black-Korean Conflict,'" 76.
[185] Edward Taehan Chang, "Confronting *Sa-i-gu*: Twenty Years After the Los Angeles Riots," 미국학 35, no. 2 (2012): 1–27.
[186] Edward Taehan Chang, "Confronting *Sa-i-gu*," 14.

represent Korean American interests and perspectives in ways that Korean Americans themselves approved of — but the English editions of such media could make direct critiques of, and cries for assistance towards, the mainstream media in ways that they would understand and be able to respond to.

Methodology and Data Collection

I conduct a content analysis of selected readings — both reporting and opinion pieces — in the *Korea Times English Edition* (KTEE), sourced entirely from the Sa I Gu archive provided by the Asian American Studies Center at the University of California, Los Angeles. The Sa I Gu archive is organized by key topics, meaning that many of these pieces are presented multiple times in the archive. The key topics are listed as follows: Korean Businesses, Latasha Harlins and Soon Ja Du, Black-Korean Relations, South Central Korean Store Boycotts Sparked by Mitchell Case, L.A. Civil Unrest, Post-Unrest Rebuilding Process and Consequences, and Role of Media. Eliminating duplicates, this total sample amounts to 67 unique articles. The range of publication date for these articles begins on October 17, 1990, relating to the Flatbush boycott in New York City, and ends on March 17, 1993, nearly two years later and almost one year after the conclusion of the L.A. riots. This provides a timeline that ends not at the mere conclusion of the riots, but with more distanced pieces that are further removed from the heightened emotionality of the event themselves. Here, we see not only perceptions of the Black-Korean conflict and interminority tensions before the riots began, but also whether thoughts on such tensions had changed after the proverbial dust had settled. Each article was read, and the racialized sentiments contained in the piece was noted. The analysis paid special attention to any mention of the mainstream media and other instruments of power (e.g. politicians, law enforcement).

Additionally, the content analysis identified if any subjectivities bled into purportedly objective new reports and stories — simply put, if coverage intended to be objective contained judgment statements, personal beliefs of the author, or otherwise was biased in its presentation of the facts. By drawing on the analysis of KTEE news narratives and recurring themes, I trace the interplay between Korean American senses of loss and trauma, and the formation of a racial identity that seeks to unify and stand stronger in spite of such hardship. This chapter advances critical media and cultural studies by attempting to make sense of the cultural artifacts and associations embedded in ethnic news media that would not be found in mainstream outlets' coverage of the same event(s).

The *Korea Times* and KTEE have a history marred with gaps in publication, turnover of ownership, and changes in the frequency of issues (daily, weekly, monthly), as tends to be the case with smaller media companies with specific targeted audiences. For example, Shah and Thornton write together in 2004 that the *Korea Times* ceased publication in October of 2001 — which is no longer true.[187] My work differs from the research undertaken by Shah and Thornton by placing a further emphasis on the audience of KTEE as opposed to the *Korea Times*. The English edition of this ethnic newspaper was predominantly targeted at members of the Korean American community whose Korean-language proficiency was not high enough to read articles written in Korean; consequently, many KTEE readers hailed from the transitional- and second-generation, meaning they had either moved to the U.S. at a young age or were born in the country. Many of the ideas found in KTEE coverage during this time, then, can help elucidate the political motivations of this younger generation — thus revealing how younger Asian Americans were inspired to become more politically engaged and push for greater representation in public office in later decades as they became older.

[187] Hemant Shah and Michael C. Thornton, *Newspaper Coverage of Interethnic Conflict*, 190.

I recognize the limitation of using just one archive — and a non-representative sample — for the purposes of this study. It should be noted that the Sa I Gu archive is not a holistic sample of *all* articles published during this time frame. Though the *Korea Times* was and still remains the largest Korean-language newspaper in the country, it is far from the only Korean-language paper that was covering the L.A. riots, both in L.A. itself and beyond. Furthermore, the Sa I Gu is only an assortment of selected articles, chosen for their focus on certain and specific key topics. This archive consequently cannot speak to the frequency of such coverage in the *Korea Times*, or how often the riots were being discussed; though unlikely, it is very well possible that coverage of the riots did not make up as sizable a portion of the newspaper's daily issues as this archive would lead one to believe. Several of the artifacts found in this archive, for instance, allude to other non-riot-related articles contained in the same issue, like in the Sports section. And lastly, the fact that this archive only includes KTEE articles — those written in English — and no articles originally written and published in Korean, means that there is limited space to evaluate intra-community discourse. Though KTEE is invaluable for its role in bridge-building between a largely immigrant and non-English-speaking minority and non-Korean readers, in addition to an English-speaking Korean American youth constituency, it is harder to determine how Korean speakers were in conversation with one another away from the eyes of the mainstream — speaking in a language that the majority could not understand. Such discourses taking place in Korean could have allowed for the reveal of beliefs and ideologies that were taboo or not as socially acceptable in the mainstream: more intimate thoughts and feelings that white normative audiences were not privy to. This may also skew the authorship and qualifications of KTEE articles as opposed to Korean-language articles in the *Korea Times*; journalists writing for KTEE, for example, likely had to come from an educational background

that taught English, and many held positions as professors or respected academics in the L.A. area.

The content analysis of the 67 articles is in agreement with much of Shah and Thornton's conclusions, much like the previous chapter. It suggests, firstly, that KTEE placed a consistent emphasis on a sense of distrust for those representing the mainstream, especially mainstream media; mass media outlets were seen as unreliable in advancing authentic Korean American histories in L.A. and stories of their setbacks. KTEE and a recurring list of journalists — Sophia Kyung Kim, Edward Chang, K.W. Lee, and more — worked to counter the Black-Korean narrative rather explicitly, implying that mainstream media could not be expected to accurately reflect the situation and station of Korean Americans like KTEE could. The archive also includes greater discussion of how Korean Americans in L.A. were politically mobilizing during and after the riots, spotlighting Korean American political activism — and, importantly, efforts at reconciliation and cooperation between Korean American outreach groups and members of the Black community — that was not present in mainstream coverage. This speaks to a third theme: the emphasis of solidarity between the Korean American and Black American communities in a time of great hurting. Korean-language media's construction of the interminority race relations in L.A. was sustained by an image of Korean American victimhood at the hands of institutional forces — a feeling that they had been wronged not by Black or other racial communities, but by U.S. society itself. It was not individuals that were to blame, but the promise of the American Dream, which had been revealed to be smoke and mirrors. These cultural dialogues underscore outrage at the loss of control and agency many felt as a result of the riots, but also a determination to grow stronger from it — contributing to a Korean American identity hardened by hardship and emboldened by a rude awakening to the realities of racial hierarchy.

How Angry is Angry Enough?

KTEE coverage of the riots is far from timid about feelings of shared trauma, and fury, experienced by the Korean American community. This anger is aimed, chiefly, at the institutions that purport to protect all Americans — precisely the same institutions Korean Americans accused of being largely absent and neglectful in Koreatown's time of need. An editorial piece from May 11, 1992 by Edward Chang, entitled "KAs Must Forge Multiethnic Coalitions," expresses outrage towards law enforcement in the L.A. area when it says: "The Los Angeles Police Department prides itself on being an organization that will 'protect and serve' its citizens. Again, where was the police? Were they at the Beverly Center protecting the rich, white American-owned properties? Somebody, please explain why the LAPD abandoned the Korean American community!"[188]

Photographs taken, both by the *Associated Press* and the *Korea Times*, from a section entitled "Under Siege" in the May 4, 1992 edition of KTEE, feature striking images of Korean Americans of all ages grappling with the destruction of their streets and businesses. The bottommost image includes a caption that reads: "A row of Korean American teen-agers who gathered to protect the shopping center are searched for illegal firearms by the police."[189] The title of this photograph suggests that the police are meddling unnecessarily in the affairs of well-intentioned and innocent Good Samaritans, once again pointing to a framing that treats police as the enemy — not only for their absence in providing support for the community, but also for unjustly and unhelpfully demonizing and alienating Korean Americans when they do step in.

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[188] Edward Chang, "KAs Must Forge Multiethnic Coalitions," *Korea Times English Edition*, May 11, 1992, 6.
[189] "Under Siege," *Korea Times English Edition*, May 4, 1992, 2.

Figure 9. "Under Siege" (*Korea Times English Edition*).[190]

Law enforcement officials, but more broadly all those in positions of power to intervene and mitigate the crisis of the riots, were perceived by KTEE reporters as providing not nearly enough aid to Korean Americans, most notably those whose shops had been looted and destroyed beyond repair. Eul Young Yu writes that U.S. leaders are callous and out of touch, attributing blame to the system for failing to protect Korean Americans and not offering help when needed:

> Where was our mayor, our police chief, our governor, our President when innocent citizens and shopkeepers were under siege on the TV screen for hours and hours and days and days? … By Wednesday evening (April 29), we knew the mobs would soon reach Koreatown. Desperate calls for help to city authorities were not answered. Koreatown leaders thought they had many friends in city hall as they gave generously to their campaign coffers. At the time of crisis, no one provided us with police protection. We had to stand alone in times of danger. Don't talk about the National Guard being held up because of an ammunition delay. That is ridiculous. Some veteran groups wanted to arm themselves in order to defend the town. Community leaders pleaded not to, that it would

[190] "Under Siege," 2.

> not be a right thing to do. Police handcuffed some armed defenders faced down on the ground, while letting looters go.[191]

Not only is anger directed at law enforcement and public officials, but a sense of distrust is also targeted at the the media for allegedly perpetuating the Black-Korean narrative. Numerous articles in the collection condemn mass media for citing interminority tensions as the only explanatory factor for rioting in L.A.'s Koreatown, with little regard for any other element of the situation. The section of the Sa I Gu archive specifically labeled "Role of Media" includes articles from 1990, years before the L.A. riots had begun, as well as pieces from months after the riots had concluded — implying that this conception of a biased and inaccurate media framing was a recurring theme in Korean American perceptions of mainstream coverage, rather than a flash point. One such article from November 18, 1991 by Richard Reyes Fruto — months before the riots began — leads with a statement about the aunt of Latasha Harlins and second-generation Korean American leaders, who "bitterly accused the white media of sensationalizing incidents involving blacks and Koreans as racial problems."[192] This article, though written on the objective side of the paper as opposed to an editorial or an opinion piece, only provides quotes from those who are critical of mainstream newspapers and television stations, clearly promoting a view that mainstream media had contributed to a further polarized community, rather than cultivated an environment where tensions could be calmed and resolved. Sophia Kyung Kim supports this argument with an article from April 3, 1991 when she includes quotes from both Korean and Black American sources that all challenge the Black-Korean media

[191] Eul Young Yu, "Dreams Burned," 6.
[192] Richard Reyes Fruto, "Media Under Fire: For Escalating Ethnic Tension," *Korea Times English Edition*, Nov 18, 1991, 7.

narrative; some merchants go so far as to refuse to sell issues of the *Los Angeles Times* in their stores.[193]

Though an overwhelming number of articles included no confirmation or support for the argument that Korean and Black tensions may have contributed to the rioting, these at-times hostile relations in the area did still find a way to bleed into coverage. An article by Kay Hwangbo on a May 1992 meeting between Korean American leaders and a visiting U.S. Civil Rights Commission delegation alludes to contention when a Black official said that Asians may "have an edge over blacks in benefiting from bank loans and government programs," a statement which earned sharp rebuke from L.A. community leader H. Cooke Sundo.[194] KTEE editor K.W. Lee in a May 11, 1991 piece directly accuses Black American opinion leaders — politicians, preachers, activists, and more — of spreading a nativist form of anti-foreigner, anti-immigrant racism against Asian Americans, "in symbiotic alliance with the guilt-ridden, white media."[195] Lee alleges that such public figures possess "selective outrage," in the process downplaying the anti-Black animosities that Korean Americans harbor towards other members of these streets.[196] And before the riots themselves, complicated feelings over the killing of Latasha Harlins and the inflaming of Black-Korean relations led some, like Soon Ja Du's son, to claim in sympathetic coverage that "black people, just because they're black, [are] trying to take it out on somebody else."[197]

As for ostensibly objective coverage imbued with subjectivities itself, several articles, like the aforementioned piece by Sophia Kyung Kim on the fanning of violence, fixate on a

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[193] Sophia Kyung Kim, "Mass Media, Agitators Fan Violence Against KA Merchants," *Korea Times English Edition*, Apr 3, 1991, 1, 13, 15.
[194] Kay Hwangbo, "Korean American Leaders Address Rights Panel," *Korea Times English Edition*, May 18, 1992, 1.
[195] K.W. Lee, "Never Again," *Korea Times English Edition*, May 11, 1992, 1.
[196] K.W. Lee, "Never Again," 1.
[197] Richard Reyes Fruto, "Son's Cry Before Du's Conviction: 'My Mother is a Scapegoat,'" *Korea Times English Edition*, Oct 21, 1991, 7.

belief within the community that more Korean Americans had been shot and killed at their businesses during robbery attempts by Black or Latino suspects, compared to only one Black American shot and killed by a Korean American merchant: Latasha Harlins. Sophia Kyung Kim points out in "The Ethnic Media's Role in the L.A. Riots", published on August 6, 1991, that 13 Korean American merchants in L.A. had been "blown away" — the term referring to being shot — at their businesses during robbery attempts, explicitly stated to be by Black or Latino suspects.[198] This statistic is employed, however, primarily to diminish the weight of Latasha Harlins' death and its consideration in heightening tensions. One interviewee in another of Kim's pieces says that, "[The media] say Koreans have never turned other incidents into racial issues when Koreans were shot by blacks, so why is the media turning this into a racial incident?"[199] From May 11, 1991, Eul Young Yu writes that many Korean Americans disagreed with Soon Ja Du's verdict for the killing of Latasha Harlins, but balances this statement with the aside that "since Jan. 1, 1990, at least 25 Korean American merchants have been killed by non-Korean gunmen."[200] Like all spaces for discourse, ethnic media too is subject to the racialized sentiments and prejudices of its producers and consumers.

KTEE coverage does not mince its words when calling out the mainstream's failure to prevent, and then mitigate, perceptions of the L.A. riots before and as they occurred. Edward Chang outright states in an interview with KTEE on November 28, 1990 that the *Los Angeles Times* "should cover the (problem) as if it were a Los Angeles story, as if it involves all Angelenos rather than just between Korean immigrants and underclass blacks."[201] K.W. Lee calls the mainstream media's sensationalism of the coverage harmful through its contribution to the

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[198] Sophia Kyung Kim, "The Ethnic Media's Role," 6.
[199] Sophia Kyung Kim, "Mass Media, Agitators," 15.
[200] Eul Young Yu, "Dreams Burned," 6.
[201] Sophia Kyung Kim, "Black-Korean Alliance Rates Media Coverage: LA Times Accused of Pitting One Race Against Another," *Korea Times English Edition*, Nov 28, 1990, 1.

"Lebanonization of the city of Angels."[202] All of these quotes point to the same shared awareness, and the same general sentiment: that the mass media and other instruments of power were actively hurting, rather than helping, the state of racial divide in the country. What this framing in KTEE speaks to is something larger than mere fury — it speaks to a feeling of betrayal. There is almost a senselessness to the chaos and destruction: an inability to articulate just how *awful* the riots were. As put by Eul Young Yu:

> The three day madness in Los Angeles has nothing to do with us Korean Americans. It was a violent explosion of anger accumulated over centuries of frustration, helplessness and alienation of the people of color in this country. The Los Angeles experience of the past several days shows that our system, one based on the dominant Eurocentric ideology — one that puts Eurocentric civilization above all others — is not working.[203]

Humanizing Korean American Subjects in News Coverage

In contrast to the *Los Angeles Times* and other media outlets, KTEE emphasizes stories that humanize its Korean American subjects, making them out to be more than faceless and nameless victims of the riots. The publication identifies forums where discourse around the riots — and what it meant for Korean Americans — is still taking place, and through this implicitly combats the mainstream's tendency to move on and forget about the losses sustained. Furthermore, they themselves point to areas of strain along racial lines, even if the coverage itself is skewed in favor of Korean perspectives and vices. "Merchants' Shattered Dreams" is an article published on May 11, 1992 that documents stories of four Korean American merchants, among the first and hardest hit by the riots, recounting the loss and devastation to their businesses and their loved ones.[204] The article includes a range of businesses, ranging from

[202] K.W. Lee, "Never Again," 1.
[203] Eul Young Yu, "Dreams Burned," 6.
[204] Sophia Kyung Kim, "Merchants' Shattered Dreams," *Korea Times English Edition*, May 11, 1992, 2.

dine-in restaurants to auto repair shops, and provides firsthand accounts of the sentiments held and reactions of those whose businesses were effectively ruined through no fault of their own. The victims do not go unnamed, nor are their theories about the riots attributed to Black-Korean relations. Sook In Kim, owner of a grocery store named Jenny's Market, at one point blames the government for his store burning down, saying that "they should have protected the community."[205] He believes that the government's failure to address poverty in the county led poor members of the Latino and Black communities in L.A. to "[blame] their poor economic state on Koreans."[206] Another business owner, this time a man named William Kim, attributed the rioting to "the politicians and the police for the emotional and physical devastation," saying that "the political fingerpointing has got to stop."[207]

Immigration Mews

Merchants' shattered dreams

Among the first and hardest hit, four store owners in South Central Los Angeles share their stories of terror, anger and disbelief.

By Sophia Kyung Kim
Korea Times

Maria's Mexican Restaurant

The remains of Maria's Mexican Restaurant in Compton.

Owners of Jenny's Market, Sook In Kim and husband, Ki Wan Kim, wait to file an insurance claim.

Jenny's Market

Slauson Furniture and Pink Furniture stores

Handy Auto Repair

Edward Hwang contributed to this story.

Figure 10. "Merchants' Shattered Dreams" (Sophia Kyung Kim/*Korea Times English Edition*).[208]

[205] Sophia Kyung Kim, "Merchants' Shattered Dreams," 2.
[206] Sophia Kyung Kim, "Merchants' Shattered Dreams," 2.
[207] Sophia Kyung Kim, "Merchants' Shattered Dreams," 2.
[208] Sophia Kyung Kim, "Merchants' Shattered Dreams," 2.

KTEE pieces include data about the riots predominantly to stress just how extensive the damage and subsequent relief efforts were. Covering pivotal business types like grocery stores, the garment industry, and dry cleaners, this coverage relies on interviews with Korean American business owners to contextualize exactly what these numbers mean in more emotional terms, with some discussion of how these industries will work to rebuild in these areas or beyond. An article by Mindy Cho almost a year after the riots' conclusion centers around a recent survey at the time of publication, finding that only three out of 10 businesses have reopened in Koreatown since the riots.[209] Richard Fruto similarly finds in January of 1993 that federal aid for mortgage and rental assistance is rapidly running out, which could result in homelessness for victims of the riots.[210] Kay Hwangbo writes on May 18, 1992 about donations totalling to $2.5 million for Korean American victims of the riots; the checks were intended to cover for food, transportation, and other basic needs.[211] Another piece from the same issue on the news side of KTEE lists exact figures for the number of stores looted or burned, and the total cost of damages, and organizes these statistics by sectors of the L.A. Korean American business community.[212] At one point, president of the California Swap Meet Sellers Association Sung Kyum Yoo notes that "the bad people only few," and "they cause the fire, but we love them, we forgive them."[213] Reminiscent of the framing of Korean American subjects as sympathetic in mainstream coverage, as articulated in Chapter 1, here KTEE stresses that the merchants harbor no ill will towards the Black members of the South-Central L.A. community.

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[209] Mindy Cho, "Riot Victims Still Suffering One Year After the Riots: Only Three Out of 10 Businesses Have Reopened," *Korea Times English Edition*, Mar 17, 1993, 1, 7.
[210] Richard Fruto, "Survey Shows Riot Victims in Dire Straights: Federal Aid Running Out; Most Businesses Still Have Not Been Rebuilt," *Korea Times English Edition*, Jan 6, 1993, 1, 7.
[211] Kay Hwangbo, "Relief Checks on the Way for KA Riot Victims: Donations Total $2.5 Million," *Korea Times English Edition,* May 18, 1992, 1, 8.
[212] Dexter H. Kim, "1,867 KA Store Owners Suffer Heaviest Toll," *Korea Times English Edition*, May 11, 1992, 1, 8.
[213] Dexter H. Kim, "1,867 KA Store Owners," 8.

Korean American activism, and political life more generally, is a prominent focus in KTEE coverage of interminority tensions before and after the riots. Naturally, coverage of political issues and Black-Korean relations was located more often on the front pages of KTEE during and after the riots, as opposed to in the years prior. The Black-Korean Alliance (BKA), said to have been formed six years before the riots, is framed in multiple articles contained in the Sa I Gu archive as an interethnic facilitator of friendly exchange between Black and Korean American L.A. residents.[214] Numerous articles also make reference to the Korean American Grocers Association (KAGRO) hosting conventions on Korean/Black relations, launching relief efforts for affected merchants, and even meeting with Bloods and Crips in an effort to open up lines of communication between communities largely seen as disparate after the riots' conclusion.[215] While the mainstream media was quick to move on after the violence had ended in Southern L.A., the fight was far from over for many Korean Americans concerned for their futures and the economic prosperity of their homes, which were direct sites for robberies and arson. KTEE published articles in the weeks, months, and years after the riots about events and other platforms for dialogue about what had happened to Koreatown — from a symposium held by California State University, Los Angeles on race relations, to protesters gathered at City Hall, to police panels based in Koreatown to hear residential concerns and feedback.[216]

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[214] Richard Reyes Fruto, "Black-Korean Alliance May Chart New Mission," *Korea Times English Edition*, June 15, 1992, 1, 7.

[215] Sophia Kyung Kim and Kay Hwangbo, "Flatbush Impact Nationwide: KAGRO Convention Focuses on Korean/Black Relations," *Korea Times English Edition*, Oct 17, 1990, 1, 14; Sophia Kyung Kim, "KAGRO Launches Relief for Embattled Merchants," *Korea Times English Edition*, May 26, 1992, 1, 8; Sophia Kyung Kim, "KAGRO Leaders Meet Bloods, Crips: Merchants and Gang Members Explore Cooperative Efforts," *Korea Times English Edition*, June 1, 1992, 1, 8.

[216] Kay Hwangbo, "Getting to the Root of Korean-Black Tensions: Cal State LA Holds Symposium on Race Relations," *Korea Times English Edition*, June 1, 1992, 1, 8; Kay Hwangbo, "Riot Victims Continue City Hall Demonstrations: Protesters Hurt by Latest Attack," *Korea Times English Edition*, July 13, 1992, 1, 7; Richard Reyes Fruto, "Police Panel Hears K-Town Gripes on Riot Response," *Korea Times English Edition*, Sep 21, 1992, 1, 7.

That Cal State L.A. symposium identified Black-Korean tensions as the result of "political and economic failures," in addition to "cultural differences, misunderstandings and skewed media coverage," as provided by an article from June 1, 1992.[217] This not only points to an event that attempted to make sense of the riots weeks after they concluded, but also provides institutional explanations for the riots that go beyond the Black-Korean narrative pushed by mainstream media outlets. These explanations attribute blame not to individuals, but to the system itself — a reaffirmation that the American Dream had led its most vulnerable advocates astray.

The American Dream and the Post-Riot Identity

Post-riot identity for Korean Americans is riddled with, in a word, restlessness. It is difficult to encapsulate in words, as many KTEE reporters and writers would attest, the intensity of loss such victims and survivors of the riots experienced. In a matter of days, many found their homes and places of business destroyed; they were made to feel unsafe in their own communities, without anyone else to turn to; at worst, they lost loved ones or their own lives in the carnage. As one piece puts it, many riot victims suffered from emotional distress and other symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, at worst culminating in suicidal ideation.[218] The amount of disillusionment with the American Dream — the realization that U.S. society was not engineered for Korean Americans, and other racial minorities, to succeed — is solidified through media coverage, where the riots serve as proof that such tragedy can and will befall Korean Americans, and will, worse, be met with general indifference or apathy from mainstream audiences.

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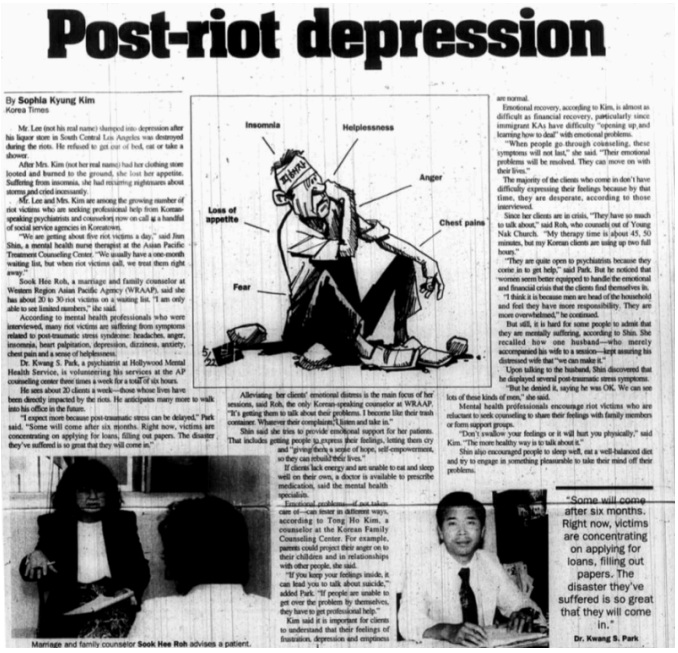
[217] Kay Hwangbo, "Cal State LA," 1.
[218] Sophia Kyung Kim, "KA Victims Seeking Professional Help: Post-Riot Depression," *Korea Times English Edition*, June 8, 1992, 4.



Post-riot depression

By Sophia Kyung Kim
Korea Times

Mr. Lee (not his real name) slumped into depression after his liquor store in South Central Los Angeles was destroyed during the riots. He refused to get out of bed, eat or take a shower.

After Mrs. Kim (not her real name) had her clothing store looted and burned to the ground, she lost her appetite. Suffering from insomnia, she had recurring nightmares about storms and cried incessantly.

Mr. Lee and Mrs. Kim are among the growing number of riot victims who are seeking professional help from Korean-speaking psychiatrists and counselors now on call at a handful of social service agencies in Koreatown.

"We are getting about five riot victims a day," said Jim Shin, a mental health nurse therapist at the Asian Pacific Treatment Counseling Center. "We usually have a one-month waiting list, but when riot victims call, we treat them right away."

Sook Hee Roh, a marriage and family counselor at Western Region Asian Pacific Agency (WRAAP), said she has about 20 to 30 riot victims on a waiting list. "I am only able to see limited numbers," she said.

According to mental health professionals who were interviewed, many riot victims are suffering from symptoms related to post-traumatic stress syndrome: headaches, anger, insomnia, heart palpitation, depression, dizziness, anxiety, chest pain and a sense of helplessness.

Dr. Kwang S. Park, a psychiatrist at Hollywood Mental Health Service, is volunteering his services at the AP counseling center three times a week for a total of six hours.

He sees about 20 clients a week—those whose lives have been directly impacted by the riots. He anticipates many more to walk into his office in the future.

"I expect more because post-traumatic stress can be delayed," Park said. "Some will come after six months. Right now, victims are concentrating on applying for loans, filling out papers. The disaster they've suffered is so great that they will come in."

Insomnia
Helplessness
Anger
Loss of appetite
Chest pains
Fear

Alleviating her clients' emotional distress is the main focus of her sessions, said Roh, the only Korean-speaking counselor at WRAAP. "It's getting them to talk about their problems. I become like their trash container. Whatever their complaints, I listen and take in."

Shin said she tries to provide emotional support for her patients. That includes getting people to express their feelings, letting them cry and "giving them a sense of hope, self-empowerment, so they can rebuild their lives."

If clients lack energy and are unable to eat and sleep well on their own, a doctor is available to prescribe medication, said the mental health specialists.

Emotional problems of riot victims can manifest in different ways, according to Tong Ho Kim, a counselor at the Korean Family Counseling Center. For example, parents could project their anger on to their children and in relationships with other people, she said.

"If you keep your feelings inside, it can lead you to talk about suicide," added Park. "If people are unable to get over the problem by themselves, they have to get professional help."

Kim said it is important for clients to understand that their feelings of frustration, depression and emptiness are normal.

Emotional recovery, according to Kim, is almost as difficult as financial recovery, particularly since immigrant KAs have difficulty "opening up and learning how to deal" with emotional problems.

"When people go through counseling, these symptoms will not last," she said. "Their emotional problems will be resolved. They can move on with their lives."

The majority of the clients who come in don't have difficulty expressing their feelings because by that time, they are desperate, according to those interviewed.

Since her clients are in crisis, "They have so much to talk about," said Roh, who counsels out of Young Nak Church. "My therapy time is about 45, 50 minutes, but my Korean clients are using up two full hours."

"They are quite open to psychiatrists because they come in to get help," said Park. But he noticed that women seem better equipped to handle the emotional and financial crisis that the clients find themselves in.

"I think it is because men are head of the household and feel they have more responsibility. They are more overwhelmed," he continued.

But still, it is hard for some people to admit that they are mentally suffering, according to Shin. She recalled how one husband—who merely accompanied his wife to a session—kept assuring his distressed wife that "we can make it."

Upon talking to the husband, Shin discovered that he displayed several post-traumatic stress symptoms.

"But he denied it, saying he was OK. We can see lots of those kinds of men," she said.

Mental health professionals encourage riot victims who are reluctant to seek counseling to share their feelings with family members or form support groups.

"Don't swallow your feelings or it will hurt you physically," said Kim. "The more healthy way is to talk about it."

Shin also encouraged people to sleep well, eat a well-balanced diet and try to engage in something pleasurable to take their mind off their problems.

Marriage and family counselor Sook Hee Roh advises a patient.

"Some will come after six months. Right now, victims are concentrating on applying for loans, filling out papers. The disaster they've suffered is so great that they will come in."
Dr. Kwang S. Park

Figure 11. "Post-Riot Depression" (Sophia Kyung Kim/*Korea Times English Edition*).[219]

Even in the years before the riots, though, the American Dream had rang hollow for many Korean Americans based in South-Central L.A., who felt as though their efforts towards material success were marred with institutional barriers and fraught relations with others in their neighborhoods and communities. Reactions to the killing of Latasha Harlins, for instance, exposed weaknesses in the very foundation of the American Dream. Here were two individuals — the young Latasha Harlins and the older Soon Ja Du — whose lives had been weighed down by the poverty, crime, and hopelessness of economic strife. K.W. Lee writes in November of 1991, that both share "the tragic everyday life in one of the city's most violent and wretched districts—both in pursuit of that elusive American Dream."[220] One's dream had been snuffed out by a bullet; the other's dream is burdened with the guilt she would bear for the rest of her life.

[219] Sophia Kyung Kim, "Post-Riot Depression," 4.
[220] K.W. Lee, "An American Passage: Latasha Becomes Part of Our Collective Conscience," *Korea Times English Edition*, Nov 25, 1991, 1, 6.

Other pieces, from even before Latasha Harlins' death, speak of Korean American shopkeepers attacked and killed by robbers and criminals "in pursuit of the American Dream," for the sake of "the very dignity of our own existence" as Korean *Americans*.[221]

This does not mean, however, that all hope is lost. In "The Burning and Rekindling of the American Dream," Sophia Kyung Kim refers to the riots in January of 1993 as "our economic holocaust" — an event that "shook the foundation of our political consciousness."[222] Yet she is far from pessimistic about the revival of Koreatown and its Korean American community. From praising the Korean American constituency for its ability to "come together for a brilliant display of peace and plea for racial harmony," to expressing hope that Clinton's presidency may usher in changes for the "underlying urban ills that helped ignite the riots," Kim argues that prayers for renewal are not enough — but that the Korean Americans of Southern L.A. are more than up to the task.[223] Such rhetoric suggests that Korean Americans conceptualized the riots not merely as a terrible tragedy to befall their community — though, of course, this was true — but as an event that catalyzed bonds within the Korean American community. In the minds of victims and survivors, the riots were proof that those in power could not be trusted or relied on, especially in times of crisis. Instead, Korean Americans depended on one another to carry them through the aftermath of the riots. This lack of broader political power, yet strengthening of imagined safety nets within the community, solidified a feeling that Korean Americans stood alone together: alone in the sense that they could turn to no outsiders for help, but together and unified under a shared sense of "Korean-ness."

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[221] K.W. Lee, "To Live and Die in America— The Urban Trenches," *Korea Times English Edition*, Dec 26, 1990, 7.
[222] Sophia Kyung Kim, "The Burning and Rekindling of the American Dream," *Korea Times English Edition*, Jan 6, 1993, 8.
[223] Sophia Kyung Kim, "Burning and Rekindling," 8.


8 Wednesday, January 6, 1993

Reflective 1992

The burning and rekindling of
the American Dream

Photo by Fred Blocker
An embittered merchant vents frustration and anger over the destruction of her swap meet in South Central L.A.

KT Photo
In the largest demonstration by Asian Americans in U.S. history, 30,000 KAs protest police and politicians' neglect and unfair media coverage.

Photo by Fred Blocker
A bewildered Korean American child sits on the curb outside the remains of a swap meet in South Central L.A.

By Sophia Kyung Kim
Korea Times

Figure 12. "The Burning and Rekindling of the American Dream" (Sophia Kyung Kim/*Korea Times English Edition*).[224]

Kim is far from the only journalist to treat the riots as such. K.W. Lee declares that "these urban warriors" — referring to Koreatown business owners — "stood alone," as police, the National Guard, and political leaders failed to direct necessary resources to these survivors.[225] But even still, Lee expresses a certain grit and determination to survive that will enable the Korean American community to flourish in spite of such hardships, stating that "these new Americans from Korea will endure—like weeds sprouting from cracks in the scorching asphalt highway."[226] He leads with a powerful quote from a victim of the riots, one that insists that Koreatown will survive because it is a reflection of the "backbone of Korean people."[227] Lee offers ways for the Korean American community to politically mobilize and manifest their sentiments regarding the riots into actual policy outcomes; these include building a network for

[224] Sophia Kyung Kim, "Burning and Rekindling," 8.
[225] K.W. Lee, "Never Again," 1.
[226] K.W. Lee, "Never Again," 1.
[227] K.W. Lee, "Never Again," 1.

emergency relief and the creation of a Korean American anti-defamation league.[228] From May 11, 1992, Edward Chang writes that the main causes of the riots are "the pervasive racism and poverty in urban American that has been neglected by the Reagan-Bush administration of the 1980s and 1990s" — pointing to systemic inequities that commonly keep those at the bottom rungs of society from achieving greater status or affluence.[229] The Korean American community, these KTEE journalists assert, must go beyond waiting for change to come: they must demand it themselves.

Black-Korean Solidarity

Given mainstream coverage of interminority race relations in South-Central L.A., one could be led to believe that Black American and Korean American community leaders shared little interest in reaching across the aisle and working towards a better understanding of one another. KTEE, however, paints a different picture. After the death of Latasha Harlins, K.W. Lee's piece from March 27, 1991 argues that "we Korean Americans … just can't buy respect and goodwill from our African American neighbors" and must work towards healing a fractured community, adding that Black neighbors "simply want respect from their Korean merchants."[230] Here, efforts from members of both groups towards interethnic dialogue and cooperation are commended, and Harlins' killing is referred to as the death of not only herself, but the death of *her* American Dream. The listing of exchanges at "churches, Black-Korean Alliance sessions, joint business ventures, mediation workshops, fund raising and grocers' support of community projects" indicates that far from regarding tensions as inevitable and not worthy of attention,

[228] K.W. Lee, "Never Again," 3.
[229] Edward Chang, "KAs Must Forge," 6.
[230] K.W. Lee, "Learn, Baby, Learn: Lessons from Latasha Harlins' Tragedy," *Korea Times English Edition*, Mar 27, 1991, 7.

minority residents of South-Central L.A. saw this as a problem that could and should be addressed through a delicate framework of communication.[231] Articles from 1991, like one from April that covers what was at the time the largest Black-Korean meeting in L.A. history between merchants and consumers to share concerns about racial tensions in the wake of Latasha Harlins' death, underscore that outreach was in fact an active project undertaken by many in the community who wanted to avoid further animosities and violence — something that the mainstream media had routinely ignored.[232] The article by Richard Reyes Fruto does note differing attitudes, and at times expressions of frustration, regarding the state of Black-Korean relations, like one point when members of the Brotherhood Crusade, a coalition of Black community groups, "stormed out because they said it would accomplish nothing."[233] Yet the article is insistent that the meeting ending on a positive note with cheers and applause "when speakers emphasized the need for better understanding between the two groups."[234]

Another article, similarly published by Fruto after Harlins' death in March, addresses these tensions with a focus on how Black and Korean community leaders have been "sensitized to the problem," noting that mechanisms for peacemaking between the two communities "had been in place since the four killings of Korean merchants in April 1986."[235] Again, this indicates that community outreach had been an ongoing process between both groups towards improving relations, rather than something that allowed to fester without solution. Aforementioned coverage of groups like BKA and KAGRO further cements the idea that KTEE was critical of

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[231] K.W. Lee, "Learn, Baby, Learn," 7.
[232] Richard Reyes Fruto, "Soul-to-Seoul Healing: Biggest Black-KA Meeting in L.A. History Held in Watts," *Korea Times English Edition*, June 15, 1992, 1, 5.
[233] Richard Reyes Fruto, "Soul-to-Seoul Healing," 5.
[234] Richard Reyes Fruto, "Soul-to-Seoul Healing," 5.
[235] Richard Reyes Fruto, "Death of a Black Teen-ager: Blacks and Koreans Join Hands to Heal Wounds," *Korea Times English Edition*, Mar 27, 1991, 1.

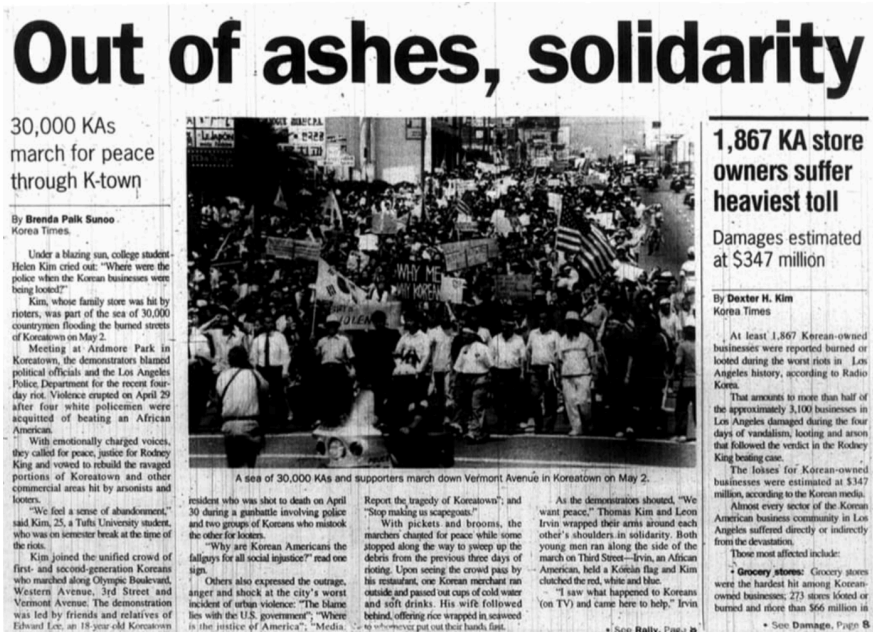
both communities, and self-reflexive in its positionality on changing relations and easing tensions.

Lastly, media framing that presents the relations between Black and Korean Americans as one bursting with hopeful potential, rather than bleak certainties, is evident in coverage of events meant to reflect racial unity across Los Angeles. Cheryl An writes about Hands Across L.A., an event in June of 1992 that amassed a crowd of 10,000.[236] The article stresses the significance of having events like these to remind people that "what happens in South-Central and North Hollywood and Koreatown affects all of us," as people "of all races and many faiths lined 121 blocks of Western Avenue" in a show of peace and unity.[237] What is striking about this coverage, however, is its attention to Korean American attendance; the report includes a quote from a member of the Korean American Coalition, description of Korean Americans ranging from elderly women in traditional Korean clothing to Buddhists from Korean temples in robes — drawing focus towards what this event means for Korean Americans, many of whom are still in mourning.[238]

By contrast, the *Los Angeles Times* article by John Dart on the same event spends the entirety of its coverage focusing on exchanges between Jewish leaders and Black congregations, expanding to touch on "a spiritual empathy between Jews and black Christians" because of a shared memory of suffering under slavery.[239] Korean Americans are only mentioned in passing in one brief paragraph, as co-chair of the Black Jewish Clergy Alliance Rabbi Harvey Fields is said to have spoken "that Sunday to Park's Korean congregation located near Chinatown."[240] They are lumped in with "the words of Anglo, black, Latino and Korean clergy and faith perspectives of

[236] Cheryl An, "Thousands Join Hands Across L.A.," *Korea Times English Edition*, June 22, 1991, 1.
[237] Cheryl An, "Thousands Join Hands," 1.
[238] Cheryl An, "Thousands Join Hands," 1.
[239] John Dart, "RELIGION: Minister and Rabbi Team Up to Ease Tensions, Help Riot Victims," *Los Angeles Times*, June 20, 1992, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-06-20-me-609-story.html.
[240] John Dart, "Minister and Rabbi."

Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Buddhists" — with virtually no attention to the fact that there was a sizable Korean American presence at the event.[241] Once again, Korean American perspectives were relegated to the background once the initial shock and spectacle of devastation to their community had faded.



Out of ashes, solidarity

30,000 KAs march for peace through K-town

By **Brenda Paik 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 whomever 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

• See Rally, Page 8

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

• See Damage, Page 8

Figure 13. "Out of Ashes, Solidarity" (Brenda Paik Sunoo/*Korea Times English Edition*).[242]

I would like to end this chapter by introducing KTEE coverage of the May 2 march — the same march referenced in the beginning of this thesis — that speaks to the additive value of ethnic media as a part of the broader media landscape. Its title is "Out of Ashes, Solidarity" — falling in line with many of the same sentiments of resilience and pride in the Korean American identity echoed in other pieces.[243] While the *Los Angeles Times* underscored the march's few Black attendees as an indication of failing Black-Korean relations and interminority resentments,

[241] John Dart, "Minister and Rabbi."
[242] Brenda Paik Sunoo, "Out of Ashes, Solidarity: 30,000 KAs March for Peace Through K-Town," *Korea Times English Edition*, May 11, 1992, 1, 8.
[243] Brenda Paik Sunoo, "Out of Ashes, Solidarity," 1, 8.

KTEE's Brenda Paik Sunoo goes out of her way to mention that Black attendees were in fact present in greater numbers than expected, and that "the presence of African American supporters added a sense of solidarity between the two communities."[244] Indeed, much of the article spotlights Black-Korean unity at this march, quoting and including a photograph of two demonstrators — Thomas Kim and Leon Irvin — walking arm-in-arm with each holding a flag: one Korean, one American. In an interview with another 28-year-old Black demonstrator, the interviewee is quoted as saying that the conflict between Korean and Black residents was "being fueled by white America blowing out of proportion incidents like the Latasha Harlins case."[245] The report stresses the multiethnic nature of the march. Another Black marcher and resident of Koreatown says "we have to stick together as one people."[246] Such media framing suggests that though the road ahead remained uncertain, KTEE and journalists from other minority press outlets saw the march's success as a powerful reminder that their communities could heal and grow from the riots.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates the vitality of ethnic media and minority press, and the unique affordances that enable them to both stand up to and speak against institutions of power. In rooting its journalistic integrity in representing the Korean American people of Southern L.A., KTEE worked in the years preceding and following the riots to challenge dominant ideologies informing mass media's coverage of the Korean American community, but more generally of the state of racial tensions and security of L.A. leading up to the riots themselves. Whereas mainstream media perceived the riots through a Black-white binary that aligned white primacy

[244] Brenda Paik Sunoo, "Out of Ashes, Solidarity," 8.
[245] Brenda Paik Sunoo, "Out of Ashes, Solidarity," 8.
[246] Brenda Paik Sunoo, "Out of Ashes, Solidarity," 8.

with Korean American victims, and Black press outlets to some extent agreed with this conclusion, KTEE makes it clear that Korean Americans did not feel accepted into the umbrella of whiteness: they had been alienated. This outright rejection of such framing came through stark denials of the Black-Korean narrative, but also more nuanced articulations of other conditions that preceded the rioting. Korean American subjects were treated with dignity even if their social status was deemed to be low and their English proficiency skills were lacking, and Korean American organizations centered around political activism and facilitating better Black-Korean relations were brought to the front and center of KTEE coverage. Though Korean Americans were still described as victims, as they had been in the mainstream, they were not victims without agency; they held power to work against the factors that had led to such destruction and loss to begin with. Thus, this more positive view of the future for Korean Americans fostered a stronger conception of the Korean American identity — fueled by anger towards the false promise of the American Dream, yes, but more importantly by a firm resolve to not trust in the institutions that had failed them, to rely on one another, and to set the foundation for a peaceful and unified Los Angeles between people of all races.

Conclusion: Applying the L.A. Riots to a Modern Context

Figure 14. "Rooftop Korean" meme posted as a reaction to the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests (Technology and Social Change Research Project).[247]

In a world still standing after the conclusion of the 1992 Los Angeles riots, what are we left with? To answer this question, we must stray away from the inherently historical and retrospective archival work conducted thus far, in order to briefly touch on the resonances of these discourses today, and how they linger and shape discussions of politics and race.

What this thesis finds is that coverage of the riots across avenues of media access — mainstream broadcast journalism, to Black minority press outlets, to the English edition of one Korean-language newspaper — addresses race as an integral part of the riots' conception and aftermath, but in critically different ways. Mass media appealing to white normative audiences, in an effort to see themselves in depictions and stories of the riots, showered sympathy upon victimized Korean American subjects, stripped of control over their own stories and, by

[247] "The One Solution to Riots the Mainstream Media Will Never Talk About" Meme, 2020, photograph, *Technology and Social Change Research Project*, https://medium.com/memewarweekly/memes-as-vigilantism-the-multi-racial-right-and-anti-black-racism-f3709477c91a.

extension, their humanity. They did so all while conforming to racially triangulated discourses that civically ostracize and relatively valorize Asian American racial positionality, and in the process cast Black Americans as dangerous mobs, lashing out irrationally due to a defective culture of poverty and crime.

Black press outlets based in urban centers outside of Los Angeles were quick to identify institutional economic and social factors that had culminated in the rioting, counter negative characterizations of Black demonstrators, and express feelings of righteous anger and disillusionment with the American system after the not-guilty verdicts in the Rodney King beating. Yet the Black public sphere presented here did not challenge the inherent assumption pushed by mainstream media that tensions between Korean Americans and Black Americans were the preeminent cause of the riots, nor did they speak against the presumption of diametric opposition between the two groups. Korean Americans, as framed in Black media coverage, could not be trusted as allies in the fight against racial oppression, for they were aligned with the oppressors and the white normative ideal.

Korean-language media, then, represent the furthest departure from dominant ideologies pushed regarding racial triangulation. KTEE journalists and writers not only argued against the Black-Korean narrative as an explanatory factor for the riots, instead attributing blame towards the failure of the American Dream, but they humanized their Korean American subjects in a way that made them out to be more than victims — something neither the mainstream nor Black press attempted. Just as Black Americans constructed a sense of internal community through cultural trauma and hardship over centuries, the L.A. riots were a rude awakening that empowered Korean Americans to construct their own sense of identity defined by a desire to reclaim the agency they had lost from the riots. This culminated in an imagined “Korean-ness” that still

persists among networks of Asian American activists, catalyzed when these individuals learned that political mobilization was the most direct method by which to achieve such goals. Thus, while Black American and Korean American press coverage are both entrenched in a deep cynicism and skepticism of the American Dream and the promise its institutions have made to both marginalized communities, the Korean American perspective is decidedly more hopeful. It speaks to a determination to grow stronger: to treat this as an inciting incident, a beginning rather than an end.

It almost goes without saying that the mainstream media forefronted perspectives that aligned with dominant society's understandings of the riots, but also of the state of racial tensions and racial progress in the country. But both the Black press and Korean-language press observed here, too, were not immune to their own racialized prejudices and biases infecting what was meant to be editorial *and* objective coverage. Opinion pieces found in Black press coverage regarded Korean Americans, especially Korean American merchants, as infestations of Black spaces, relying on racist forever foreigner and yellow peril stereotypes that persist in dominant ideological framings. They were quick to dismiss Black-Korean solidarity as an impossibility — and, even if such coalition-building was possible, as a thoroughly undesirable prospect given conceptions of "Korean racism" that treat anti-Black prejudice as naturalized and ubiquitous within the Korean American community. Articles found in Korean-language media, though less overtly imbued with anti-Black or tense subjectivities, continually downplayed anti-Black sentiments possessed by Korean American communities. Some accused the Black American community of forging an alliance with white society to engage in anti-Asian racism, while others cited statistics meant to minimize the severity of Latasha Harlins' death. Principles of racial triangulation that treat Black Americans and Asian Americans as sharing no common ground and

competing for higher social status thus contribute to the dialogue facilitated within these affective racial counterpublics, which can be either challenged or perpetuated through such platforms.

It is worth reiterating that this thesis does not aim to suggest that Black-Korean hostilities did not exist in the L.A. region and beyond. They most certainly did, and to what degree this contributed to the rioting itself remains to be fully known; there is evidence to support that animosities between the two groups did result, to some extent, in increased rates of violence in the time before and during the riots.[248] But the lack of acknowledgment that this is only one part of the story — that there are other factors that inform such tensions — and that this is not an inevitable and inherent element of Black-Korean tensions — that *it does not always have to be this way* — only further complicates political work undertaken to bring racial communities together. It is not productive to assume that Black Americans and Korean Americans are destined to stand alone because of irreconcilable differences. Diametric opposition is a hindrance to racial equality; to engage in its rhetoric is to stand in the way of progress.

A Post-Riots World, Unrealized

Evidently, we do not live in a "post-riots" world. Social and political movements, which can often escalate into destructive scuffles or violent expressions of outrage and grief, are practically baked into the American foundation. It is worth asking ourselves how the 1992 L.A. riots, but more broadly the racialized narratives espoused through its coverage, continue to affect our negotiation of racial issues as they occur.

The affective racial counterpublics contained in minority newspapers were generally inaccessible to the mainstream. But today, affective racial counterpublics are held online on

[248] Edward Taehan Chang, "Confronting *Sa-i-gu*."

social media platforms and other digital technologies, which makes these intimate conversations that much more public. What were once considered private and internal perceptions possessed by members of one group against another don't need mainstream outlets to shed light on them, because they in the first place are in a space that can be breached by "outsiders." This results in a counterpublic that is constantly mediated by the knowledge of such exposure. When members of the New York University (NYU) chapter of Lambda Phi Epsilon, the largest Asian-American fraternity in North America, expressed racist sentiments concerning the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests in a private group chat, the Asian American community was forced to reckon with notions of anti-Blackness after these messages were leaked on Twitter.[249] The screenshots included messages such as "black people also don't recognize that they kill each other the most for some reason" and "[Asians] grinded significantly harder while black peoples were lazy."[250] This resulted in public outcry and a suspension for the fraternity that year. Social media can work to foster points of connection between individuals, but can also exacerbate the existence of in-groups and out-groups.

Digital platforms also enable iconography of the 1992 L.A. riots to persist in conversations about ongoing strides towards racial and social equity from different groups. Memes featuring Korean American shopkeepers sitting on the roofs of their stores with guns, intent on protecting their businesses from potential looters — known as "Roof Koreans" or "Rooftop Koreans" — are most frequently shared amongst the white far-right, despite depicting Korean American subjects. Memes, as defined by Limor Shifman, are digital content units that are created with awareness of one another and are circulated across the Internet.[251] This means

[249] Matthew Fischetti, "Fraternity Suspended After Racist Messages Leaked Amid Nationwide Anti-Racist Protests," *Washington Square News*, May 30, 2020, https://nyunews.com/news/2020/05/30/fraternity-suspended-after-racist-messages-leaked-amid-nationwide-anti-racist-protests/.
[250] Matthew Fischetti, "Fraternity Suspended."
[251] Limor Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture* (MIT Press, 2013).

that memes are not necessarily meant to be read as funny — though a humorous component can aid its spread and virality. Such media texts frame Rooftop Koreans as heroic, patriotic, and true Americans for exercising their Second Amendment right.[252] "Rooftop Korean" memes are polysemic in nature, meaning they contain multiple related meanings, oftentimes understood by and for different communities. While it may seem at first glance that these memes provide favorable representation for Asian Americans, a closer examination reveals that racialized rhetoric employed by their creators still Others and furthers alienate Asian Americans from the white majority and the white normative ideal; they include racist phrasings and signifiers meant to mimic Asian accents and Orientalist fonts. Korean Americans — and by extension Asian Americans — are still regarded as foreign and therefore inferior to white Americans.

Figure 15. "Rooftop Korean of the Middle Class" meme posted as a reaction to the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests (Technology and Social Change Research Project).[253]

[252] Brittany Wong, "The Real, Tragic Story Behind That 'Roof Korean' Meme You May Have Seen," *Huffington Post*, June 11, 2020, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/roof-koreans-meme-know-real-story_n_5ee110a1c5b6d5bafa5604f3.
[253] "Rooftop Korean of the Middle Class" Meme, 2020, photograph, *Technology and Social Change Research Project*, https://medium.com/memewarweekly/memes-as-vigilantism-the-multi-racial-right-and-anti-black-racism-f3709477c91a.

Just as Asian Americans in the Lambda Phi Epsilon fraternity expressed racially triangulated sentiments, however, a certain alliance has formed between right-wing Asian Americans and proponents of white supremacy — serving as a way for these Asian Americans to affiliate and align themselves with white primacy, even if this means engaging in practices of self-deprecation. Part of this inclination towards putting oneself down in the hopes of being accepted by those in power, I argue, comes uniquely from the characterizations of Asian American men as being docile, submissive, and undesirable.[254] The fact that "Rooftop Korean" memes then serve as an affirmation of Asian masculinity, a refreshing departure from dominant readings of Asian American identity, encourages anti-Black beliefs to spread in Asian American circles. By building up the "Black criminal" in the cultural imaginary, this justifies existing prejudices possessed by Asian American communities against Black Americans.

What becomes clear through these case studies is that the 1992 L.A. riots still matter. It is easy to isolate historical events in their own time and place, treating them as entirely divorced from the present, but it's important we remain cognizant that nothing is contained in a vacuum. Whether examining the memeification of Rooftop Koreans — and the co-opting of such images by libertarians and gun rights activists — racially triangulated discourses that continue to be had in digital spaces, or modern reinterpretations of the riots through art and entertainment, it is evident that, though the existing scholarship on the L.A. riots is extensive, there is still much work to be done with regards to the Asian American Studies discipline.

[254] David L. Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Duke University, 2001).

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