

Edward Norden

South-Central Korea: Post-Riot L.A.

A traumatized American community rebuilds—and rethinks.

Looking at the man, you wouldn't expect Roy Kim to show prolonged courage in a dicey situation. That's a mistake, because it has always required tremendous sustained courage for anyone to operate a business day-in, day-out in the tougher neighborhoods of L.A. Exactly twenty-five Korean-American shopkeepers in these neighborhoods were blasted away in the twenty-six months preceding the riots. Kim's business is in the toughest neighborhood of all, South-Central. Small



physically, he's a tough customer, though he lacks that hardness around the eyes and mouth that implies guts in all kinds of physical specimens.

Which isn't to say that his liquor-and-sundries store went untouched. As Kim recalled one recent morning in poor English, there was nothing he could do when the looters showed up in force soon after the Rodney King verdict. He could only watch them raid the shelves. But he was determined not to be torched, so when it became clear that the police were going to stay out of it, he got a rifle and kept the individuals with the firebombs away for 72 hours until the National Guard arrived. While most of his competitors

and fellow Korean-Americans in the area have nothing to return to except ashes, he is back in business with a new inventory.

Kim's story before the verdict was the usual one for KAs who had set up in South-Central. He stepped off the plane with \$100 in his pocket, and by mobilizing his family, joining a *kye*, and working fifteen-hour days for fifteen years, put enough aside to buy a mortgaged house in the suburbs. No less typical was the trouble he had with shop-lifters and gang

kids who threatened to do him in if he didn't show them more respect. Trouble went with the territory, and though it made him wonder about his adopted country, he never dreamed that for several days and nights the authorities would ever let pure chaos reign. Now he's wiser, and doing great business. As he spoke—and as his wife, his cousin, and two employees, one Mexican and one black, did various chores—some of the local jobless shambled in with their welfare money and bought fortified wine in brown paper bags to party with on and around a broken sofa in the parking lot.

A few miles and light years away, on the twenty-eighth floor of the sleek Arco building downtown, Tong Soo Chung says that, for him as well, the police disappearing act was an eye-opener. T.S., as his Anglo friends call him, ar-

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rived in this country as a teenager in 1972 with less English than Roy Kim has today. His trajectory upward has been unusually steep, even for a Korean-American—Hollywood High, Andover, B.A. from Harvard, M.A. from Princeton, law degree from UCLA, a third-place finish in a Democratic primary for state assembly. It was T.S.'s belief that he had come to know America tolerably well. But though he had heard of the events in Watts long ago, and though the LAPD had always left something to be desired, he never imagined this. Which is to say, he might have imagined the powers-that-be letting the gangbangers run wild in their own turf in South-Central, but not letting them invade Koreatown itself. That's what stunned KAs, from T.S. on down. Few still hope, as he does, for an apology from the black clerics and politicians who failed to curb their tortured community's fatherless boys. But many continue to believe in a conspiracy to hit Korean places all over town and a high-level decision to throw Koreatown to the wolves.

We'll return to T.S. in his blinding white shirt and power suspenders later. First, some ethnic history and urban geography. Only the poorest, bravest, and—as it turned out—unluckiest KAs did business in South-Central. Most set up north of Pico Boulevard between downtown and the Jewish Westside, reviving a slummy neighborhood with thousands of new enterprises in the last couple of decades. This is Koreatown, complete with Korean newspapers, radio stations, hotels, restaurants, pharmacies, churches, travel agencies, and bars where young hostesses lead middle-aged men in singing along to videotapes in Korean.

Every third enterprise seems to be owned by a Kim. The L.A. phone book lists six pages of Kims, Kim meaning "gold" in Korean and being the equivalent of Jones. Almost 800,000 Koreans have moved to the U.S. since Congress wrote new, non-racist immigration laws in 1965. A quarter have settled in Southern California. But if no KA makes his home in South-Central, neither is Koreatown exclusively Korean. As soon as they can, the newcomers yank their kids out of the inner city and its lousy schools and buy into the suburban dream, commuting from Cerritos, Garden Grove, Downey. On the stoops of Koreatown's side streets you therefore hear mostly Spanish. Both here and in South-Central, in other words, the Korean-American plays the traditional Jewish role of man-in-the-middle, the custom-made scapegoat, the merchant on his own in a neighborhood where the big chains and the banks fear to tread, setting his own prices and squirreling away the profit to pay his children's way through college. His customers, whether on welfare or

working their butts off, are always liable to believe that he is gouging them.

It was the Spanish-speaking poor who looted the strip mall at Western and 9th in Koreatown. "WHERE WAS THE POLICE?" asks the banner over a shop not yet reopened. You see individual sites burned to a crisp along Olympic, along Vermont, but not entire blocks eviscerated Beirut-style, as in South-Central. Many Koreatown stores and entire malls went untouched, either because the mob didn't get around to them or because the owners and the paramilitary units organized in a matter of hours drove them away with gunfire. Doubtless the most impressive locale is the pristine marble, glass, and steel Koreatown Plaza on three levels with atrium, noodle shops, electronics, Italian fashions, a serious Korean-language bookstore, and nary a round-eye anywhere. What was it Roy Kim said when asked what the mob's motives were? "Jealous." To walk around Koreatown and see what a bunch of immigrants have been able to do in the land of opportunity in less than two decades—most of the KAs came after 1975—had one Anglo reporter shaking his head with admiration. The emotion kindled by these sights in the heart of a black American is liable to be a different one.

But admiration is the only possible reaction to the way the KAs organized and tried to save their property and livelihoods. Within hours of realizing that they were on their own, a group met at the South Korean consulate on Wilshire to form a kind of militia. This included men who had been army officers in the Old Country, and boys in Dodgers caps. Some units were sent to reinforce important malls while others deployed for rapid response—their communications net was cellular phones and the switchboard and announcers of Radio Korea, 1580 on the AM dial, which turned its studio into a war room for the duration. Such an instant defense force probably couldn't have been whistled up if the KAs hadn't already put an infrastructure of crime watchers in place to deal with constant muggings and break-ins over the years. The difference now was that all hell had suddenly broken loose, and in response, the vets and some of the boys were armed.

In a way, it was the community's finest hour. The embittered T.S. Chung himself, who can be pretty hard on his people, draws solace from the way they behaved, even though the only KA fatality was a boy mistaken for a looter by the militia. Without the men on the roofs with guns, the devastation of property would have been greater, and perhaps more important, so would the spiritual devastation. To say quite truthfully that it could have been worse, however, should not be to minimize what actually occurred—1,867

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KA-owned businesses around L.A. were looted and/or torched, about \$350 million worth of KA-owned real estate and goods transformed into rubble or gleefully carted away.

Since the liquor stores, flea markets, gas stations, and dry cleaners in South-Central were beyond the reach of the militia, and closer to the red-hot epicenter of the chaos, virtually none escaped destruction, earning their owners membership in the Association of Korean-American Victims of the L.A. Riot. At the headquarters of this new association, located between the Radio Korea building and the Korean-American Presbyterian Church, you can slice the anger with a knife. KAs typically are Protestants, and maybe fatalism lapses when you trade Confucianism in for Western philosophy and Seoul for the City of Angels.

The Anglo bureaucrats from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and KA volunteers with American educations, were helping these angry, humiliated folk with the paperwork of food stamps, welfare, low-interest loans. It's rare for Korean immigrants to go on the dole, even in the beginning. For these people it was shameful to have to prove, in triplicate, not only that the livelihoods they had created had been destroyed, but that they had no savings, no insurance, and no close relatives working. The long-term loans at 4 percent that Congress swiftly authorized

for reconstruction weren't appreciated either. Burned-out merchants like the beefy Jin Lee didn't understand why they should have to go into debt, begin from scratch again, when their distress was the government's fault. The government had failed to enforce the social contract. It had let the blacks and Latinos stew in the inner city for years, then let them run amok. It owed the victims not a loan but compensation.

Lee, 27, a decade in America and speaking in a black American accent, says that if he were a black kid, he would have looted and burned, too—an unexpected claim from a man who had his own liquor-and-sundries store totaled and whose extended family lost six of its eight businesses. He doesn't blame the kids so much as the sanctimonious, so-called moderate black adult *condottieri* with their pipelines

to City Hall who in his opinion encouraged the blow-out. Like T.S. Chung, he wants apologies. Yet even more emotionally than he blames the black ministers, he blames the police and "Beverly Hills," by which he means the richest whites in town, who according to him pull the strings. It was "Beverly Hills" that decided Koreatown would take the brunt while richer neighborhoods got shielded. "Beverly Hills" ought to watch out—the KAs now are armed and disillusioned, and they have their own morons who, if there is a next time, may turn on the Anglos. Though he may have been trying to stand the short hairs on a reporter's neck on end, Lee wasn't the only KA at least as mad at the whites as at the blacks.

Of course, none of the cops at the local station will admit



that the LAPD failed, much less was ordered by Chief Daryl Gates to withdraw and let the KAs be ravaged. Detective Lieutenant Paul Kim, a KA with seventeen years on the job, scoffs at such ideas. Koreatown happens to border South-Central—no conspiracy there. And if it seemed that the police retreated, Kim explains that this was because so much exploded so fast in so many places at once, stretching an undermanned, underequipped force way past its limits.

Kim finds himself in a delicate situation. He must juggle dual loyalties and repeatedly emphasizes that he speaks only for himself. On the one hand, he dismisses the idea that any neigh-

borhood was abandoned. On the other hand, he calls the KAs an "insular" community that perhaps suffered from "a lack of communications [with] the authorities" when the sky fell. On the one hand, Kim is proud of the way the militia rose to the occasion. On the other, he's worried about the weapons out there and that people may now count more on themselves than on the legally constituted authorities responsible for protecting them.

Post-riot gun sales in Koreatown have been brisk. And why not? Some 1,100 guns are said to have been looted around L.A. by gang members during the riots, or if you will the rebellion. This intelligence, along with a knowledge of certain rap lyrics, makes an eight-hour ride-along in an LAPD black-and-white not exactly a relaxing ex-

perience. You hope that no one will open up on a harmless reporter, and you feel for the cops who put their lives on the line while knowing that even fewer people now fear them than like them. We're talking, at the Wilshire station, about a force commanded by a barrel-chested white male, but composed in the main of black, Latino, and Asian men and women. A night shift, before hitting the street, hears a lecture on sexual harassment, a report on a building where gangbangers have stocked arms, and a few words from a lethal-looking white assistant D.A. on how to conduct a search the judge won't throw out. The D.A. appears to be the most dangerous person in the room—the others could be social workers in uniform, nice guys and gals whose laid-back demeanor and bright patter hint at a serious morale problem.

A couple of hours on patrol with the white Sergeant Natale. There are alleyways in South-Central, their claustrophobic walls busy with gang markings, that make you think of the Gaza Strip. A child-abuse report over the radio net is followed by a possible shooting over the radio net, but the only call the sergeant has to answer turns out to involve a very nice black lady deep in one of the graffiti neighborhoods who has had her compact Japanese car lifted onto cement blocks and all the wheels swiped. The woman is assured she won't get a parking ticket.

Natale shakes his head. He resides in Orange County, the round trip is three hours, it's worth it to shelter his kids. Almost everybody in the station commutes. His specialty: narcotics. Most drivers under the influence of drugs, he says, drive too slow. Natale echoes Kim's defense of the LAPD's performance in the riots and freely acknowledges that morale is shot. The public, or rather a vociferous, unrepresentative minority, wants the impossible—get the bad guys, but be gentle. Proposition F, the referendum trimming the independence of the police, passed because the Silent Majority didn't vote. What's a cop to do? As a result of Rodney King and Proposition F, if a suspect apprehended in a high-speed, adrenaline-pumping chase refuses to assume the position, you're now expected, if you value your career, to lay off the stick and the choke-hold and swarm him with your bare hands.

Maybe the new chief, Willie Williams, will improve the climate, Natale says, the implication being that under a black chief the department will be given a break by the activists and media. In fact, one of the first things Williams was to do in office was to disband a J. Edgar Hoover-type spying unit, for which the media praised him and which caused grumbling in the higher ranks.

The station, next door to a Thrifty supermarket that is scorched and gutted, is constructed like a fortress. Sergeant Cummings, a black twenty-three-year veteran, is preparing to go out on patrol. Over the years, he has seen everything—even the kind of thing he was now called to. Yes, responding to "shooting in progress," a couple of black-and-whites traveling with flashers and sirens had collided. A completely avoidable Keystone Kops scene to which a local TV crew got even before Cummings. The crowd of Angelenos he stepped through didn't snicker as the injured officers entered the ambulance under their own steam.

Cummings was to spend most of the rest of the evening at the emergency room of Hollywood Presbyterian with two of the embarrassed officers, both young blacks. The trademark joking went on. Even the black doctor who supervised the X-rays, prescribed the Tylenol and codeine,

and authorized five days of sick leave joined in, leaving only the Latino civilian with the DTs on an adjacent bed to groan. It was late when the paperwork was finished and the doped-up cops were discharged. Cummings made a tsk-tsk noise when he heard over his car radio that the "shooting in progress" had been a false alarm. "Four black males

throwing rocks," crackled a female voice on the radio. "Domestic violence, black male." Cummings saw no need to help out on these calls. He did, however, respond to one near Beverly Hills, where an elderly couple, Harry and Sylvia, had been held up by a young black man in a white T-shirt in the garage of their apartment building. The man had struck Sylvia on the head with the butt of his gun when she hesitated to part with her rings. Cummings helped calm the woman as a coed pair of officers gently took the details—was the man as dark as or lighter in color than, for example, the Sergeant was?

Cummings is very dark. Back in the car, he sighed. It was too bad. This guy would probably fence the stuff with no problem, but such things had been going on since Cummings was a rookie. What was new was all these guns and the readiness of the kids to use them. Sylvia was actually lucky. Cummings himself was psychologically and otherwise prepared to retire. He had just been called to the bar after getting his law degree in night school, and looked forward to a second career, maybe something with corporations. However, he had decided with his wife to stick it out two more years for the full pension.

He too said loyally that the department shouldn't be blamed for not quelling the riot at the outset. Too much happened too fast, etc. But he offered an explanation for the fact that there did not seem to have been a contingency plan, and that there was no pre-verdict mobilization, which

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the reporter had not heard before: namely, that no one in the department expected the Rodney King cops all to be acquitted. Cummings was scandalized when they were. Could the riot have been stopped anyway if the order to shoot had been given? Cummings shook his head. Things had changed in America, especially in mellow, ultra-sensitive L.A., since 1968 and the riots in Newark and Detroit when Dr. King was assassinated—you no longer opened fire, you no longer took human life to protect property. This, in Cummings's opinion, was progress. Nevertheless, to protect his children, he lived even farther out than Nantale, clear over the mountains in the desert hamlet of Palmdale.

The sergeant is both smart and typical. Like the KAs, black Americans who can depart the inner city tend to do so. The vital difference is that while much of the KA middle class commutes to Koreatown to work, the ordinary black middle-class intact family that departs South-Central does so forever, never looking back, leaving Koreans to man the commercial trenches, dubious "activists" to prey on emotions of futility and self-pity, and the kids of adolescent mothers to grow up without those proverbial good role models.

The reporter was to visit South-Central again. There he met more than one bigshot with a manicure, permanent wave, outsize rings, a Cadillac in the parking lot, and a wall of plaques commemorating his services to the community. As a rule, these gentlemen had nothing bad to say to a white reporter about the rioters. Indeed, for most of them, the events didn't constitute a riot at all but a "rebellion," with everything that implies of justifiable and constructive action. The fellows who beat that truck driver on T.V. and are in custody have even been honored with a sobriquet—"The L.A. Six." It wasn't in the power of black leaders to stop the rebellion, nor was it their job. Whites should heed the message, one such leader told the reporter. If jobs, grants, and new welfare programs weren't forthcoming, this rebellion would be just an appetizer. As for the KAs, their losses were unfortunate, but South-Central would be better off without so many liquor stores.

That's an idea almost everyone agrees on. The Rev. Ed Grice of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, who wants not a single liquor store rebuilt, is doing something about it. The SCLC has a spick-and-span office a hop and a jump from both some charred remnants of KA businesses, and some side-streets where blacks keep neat lawns and make courageous attempts to lead decent, law-abiding lives with little money and much ideological confusion. It's not easy. Consider that the logo of the SCLC features, of course, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., yet in the lobby, his icon-portrait shares pride of place with that of Malcolm X. Both men have to be somersaulting in their graves to be married like this, and the fact that they are means that King's apostles at the SCLC have had to corrupt

his legacy to appeal to the younger generation. Rev. Grice, your comparatively attractive sort of activist, is ready to half-admit as much. Malcolm's writings are little read. The young, says Grice, simply equate him with aggressive pride, which is enough to make him their hero. The various churchmen, in contrast, seem weak, and the churches in South-Central are locked except on Sunday mornings.

It wasn't so in Crocker, Texas, where Grice grew up singing hymns and using the cast-off school texts of white kids. Though not a bitter type, he's bitter about the poor formal education a racist country gave him. He nevertheless pulled himself into the middle class—for twelve years

before coming to the SCLC, he actually worked at the Federal Reserve Bank. The number of blacks who have quit such jobs in the big world to come back and work directly for their people may be counted on the fingers of one hand. The black middle class, Grice admits, has deserted its brethren. Furthermore, much of the so-called culture that blacks are foisting on themselves is just appalling, especially the gangsta' rap hypnotizing and brutalizing the young. Grice's eldest son is a rapper himself, but with a difference. His group, Apocalypse, pushes Christian nonviolence and personal salvation. While under no illusion that Apocalypse will overtake Ice-T on MTV, Grice counts his blessings. He says he tries to get his younger kids to understand that Michael Jordan should be admired not for his millions but



for his self-discipline. Blacks must take a portion of the blame for their plight and assume much of the responsibility for climbing out of it.

Which isn't to say that Grice is one of your too few black conservatives. From his angle, they're sucking up to the powers-that-be by blaming the victim. For though legalized racism may be a thing of the past in the United States of America, you still haven't got a level playing field—a pregnant woman in South-Central doesn't get the prenatal care at an under-funded clinic that a woman in Beverly Hills gets from her doctor, and if a black and a white with identical jobs and credit histories go to the Bank of America for a business or housing loan, the white is likelier to get a yes than the black. So why not found bigger, stronger, more aggressive black banks with the black money out there, or the black version of the *kye*, the hybrid lottery and savings-and-loan scheme to which masses of KAs belong? That's an idea, Grice says, without enthusiasm. Or why not mobilize families—even in South-Central, there are intact families—to run mom-and-pop shops for fifteen hours a day in place of KAs? Because, says Grice, blacks don't have that kind of cultural tradition, nor should they be asked to behave as if they did—they're Americans, not foreigners! He counters a white reporter's uppity questions by saying that capitalism breeds an underclass, and declaring that it's a government's duty to put and keep a floor under every person's feet, as in Sweden.

All that is theoretical, however, compared with Grice's campaign this summer, aimed at stopping the rebuilding of the liquor stores. It fits in with the nationwide SCLC war on drugs that he has headed locally for a couple of years. Here is where black and KA interests collide. He insists, as do many other blacks and indeed KAs, that the media have it wrong, that the problem between the two groups isn't racial. True, many KA merchants were cold to their black customers. They didn't hang out, they didn't show their appreciation, they were suspicious. Though this was no justification for looting and burning,

Grice believes he owes no apology to Jin Lee and T.S. Chung for failing to stop the gang members: Did any KA apologize when a KA grocer—in a locally notorious incident long before the Rodney King verdict—was let off with a fine after shooting to death a black girl in a dispute over a bottle of soda pop? In any event, some good may come of the fires if those liquor stores that were such eyesores, such magnets for prostitutes and gamblers and hoodlums and casualties, aren't resurrected. When it's suggested to him that demand for the pain-killing booze will remain what it was, simply making survivors like Roy Kim rich, Grice says he doubts it. His allies on the City Council have rammed through an ordinance requiring "community hearings" on each application to rebuild.



The trouble is that, like Roy Kim's, most of these stores also carried sundries like bread, milk, and diapers. Now that most of them in South-Central are gone, and the chains aren't jumping into the breach, the sober poor have nowhere to go for necessities except the emergency handout distribution points. There's one at the African-American Community Unity Center, a disused church across the street from a bombed-out mall. The other day, the patient, tranquil, close-packed, fatalistic line—mainly women, a great many Hispanics, one black guy whose store was incinerated—meandered half a block in the sunshine to receive tortillas, instant mashed potatoes, flour, rice,

canned tomatoes, a box of Pampers for each accompanying baby. "God bless," said one man as he took the food. "Rodeo Drive—Beverly Hills" said the T-shirt on a teenaged mother. Everything was free, donated by charities and utility companies. You weren't even asked for food stamps or ID, so in a way it was a bonanza. There's also used clothing given away twice weekly. But it won't go on forever. At some point the charities will tire and Southern California Edison will decide it has done enough of the right thing, the TV pictures of the riot will fade into memories. Where then will the Pampers and Wonderbread be available, if the Kims and Lees aren't permitted back—or indeed, decide they've had it?

That's what the Jewish middlemen decided after the

Watts riots in 1965. They got out any which way, taking the payoff on riot insurance if they carried any, or selling their stores cheap to blacks who thought they could make a go of it. So that when the KAs landed a decade later, it was usually not a Jew they took over from, but a black who had realized that for one reason or another he couldn't earn a living in a risky black neighborhood turning Latino. It's too early to say whether the KAs will do as the Jews did, at the most holding on to some properties and leasing them to even greener immigrants, Cambodians for example. On the one hand, the victimized KAs have less to fall back on than their Jewish predecessors—they and their community are much newer to the country and some, lacking savings and insurance, may have no choice but to go back if they can. On the other hand, the riot, and the attitude of the police and City Hall, have cut deep. Even those who do re-open in South-Central will probably only remain temporarily, until their Americanized children have been educated and they can afford to get out. Instead of rebuilding the liquor stores, Ed Grice suggests, groups of KAs should build proper supermarkets. But among neither blacks nor KAs will you find anyone who sincerely believes there is a long-term future for the likes of Roy Kim in the area.

Not even the KA youngsters who have bucked the quotas on Asians and matriculated at some of the nation's finest universities believe it. Unsurprisingly, a percentage majoring in the humanities and social sciences will repeat a line to the effect that the Koreans, the blacks, and the Latinos are all victims of capitalism together. Which is to say, they are minorities whom the racist Anglo powers set at each other's throats to divert them from what's really being perpetrated. It would be surprising if, on campuses like UCLA, Stanford, and Berkeley, certain sons and daughters of KAs who slaved 15-hour days to pay their tuitions didn't learn to parrot this stuff. Indeed, a few Americanized kids go so far as to confess their own people's, their own parents' guilt for what happened. "We are an insolent community," says a KA young woman with a higher degree whom it would be cruel to identify. "We don't make an effort to reach outside." Talk about blaming the victim! The solution is therefore to be less Korean, nicer, to ally with other discriminated-against minorities, lighten up, and get collectively empowered. Yet even among these kids, you won't find any who foresee South-Central full of KA merchants again.

Bringing us back to T.S. Chung. Although he majored in sociology at Harvard and ran for state assembly as a Democrat, he calls himself a fiscal and social con-

servative. Yes, the KA shopkeepers are the foot-soldiers of capitalism, he says. No, what happened to too many of them wasn't capitalism's fault.

Notwithstanding the impression you get from talking with those KAs at UCLA not majoring in the hard sciences, engineering, economics, pre-law and pre-med, most K.A.s are on the same wave length as T.S. Those of the first or second generation who have been naturalized or were born here tend to vote Republican after their move to the suburbs. Then why did T.S. run as a Democrat? His motive was less ideological than practical. The district he contested, including a part of Koreatown, is largely Hispanic and poor—not exactly Reagan country. Furthermore, at least in California, the Democratic party, the old home of minorities, tries harder, wooing Asians and making room for their up-and-comers. T.S., 35 years of age, thinks the Republicans are missing a bet there. He can also imagine not remaining a Democrat forever. Post-riot, his politics are up in the air. As is the faith of ordinary KAs in the American way. Previously, most believed that each KA or KA family could fixate on working hard and getting an education, and America would pay them back with both prosperity and safety. Where there's smoke there's fire—the KAs were somewhat insular, they did shun

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politics in their new land, many of the first generation failed to trade in their old citizenship for U.S., a prerequisite for voting here. The faith that good Calvinist behavior at all times would be enough to ensure protection in a bad time, that political deals could wait, is probably gone for good. You hear new buzzwords. Organize! Register! Pressurize! The bitter, quietly self-contained, and by no means nerdy T.S. is even surer than before that the KAs can't really make it in America if they don't play the political game. He is more aware than most of the bitter people at the victims' center are, however, of how long and hard the road to political leverage is going to be for a model minority, i.e., one that is really small and causes so few problems that it needn't be appeased.

Immigration continues, but there aren't that many KAs yet. Once established, they spread out and the females intermarry with Anglos. The formation of lobbies with other Asian-Americans to promote common interests is a much-talked-about possibility, maybe utopian—what does a KA have in common with someone from Cambodia, except that they both have to crash the same quota at Berkeley and, if male, can't get a white girlfriend to save their lives? A first-generation KA and a first-generation Cambodian-American have as much in common as a Scot and a Ukrainian. The KAs will probably have to look out for themselves. It's easy

to be harder on them than the facts justify. Even T.S. may be guilty of this. After all, most have been here less than a generation. It would be demanding the impossible to expect them not only to have set themselves on their economic feet and begun sending their sons and daughters to be doctors and lawyers, but also to have acquired the unlisted numbers of the mayor, the governor, and so on. If there could have been a high-level decision to throw Koreatown to the wolves, as T.S. suspects, it was because the riots came too soon, before persons of his generation had had the chance to become insiders.

The right phone calls to the right people, followed by the right decisions by those people, could have made the difference, Chung thinks. He believes that the riot could have been contained in the first two hours, as Watts was, if the police had cordoned off South-Central. In other words, there were opportunistic neighborhood looters all over town, but the elements who did the breaking in and torching were gang members who came up largely from South-Central. Why didn't the police throw up a perimeter? Though the case law is weak, T.S. has considered a suit against the city for dereliction. He's looking forward to William Webster's report on the LAPD's performance and the anatomy of the events. It will be interesting to find out whether Koreatown and KA businesses elsewhere suffered heavily because they were in the way of the predators, or whether the gangs conspired before the King verdict to hit them. In any case, the Webster report will have to be credible and the victimizers will have to be seen to be punished if much faith is to be restored.

TS. has agreed to serve on the blue-ribbon panel called Rebuild L.A. This includes the governor, the mayor, the new police chief, people of every one of the ethnicities, Cardinal Mahoney, Hollywood lights, everybody and his sister. Rebuild L.A. is supposed to pick up the pieces and reassemble them so that there isn't a next time. In practice, it's a fine example of American optimism coupled with the reckoning that if everyone is allowed to have his say and given at least a crumb of the reconstruction pie, an affirmative reply can finally be given to Rodney King's heartfelt question, "Can we live together?" Each of the ethnic and gender appointees is therefore supposed to look out for his group's interest, while keeping the good of the whole shaken city foremost in mind, and of course being realistic. The potential for trouble is obvious. T.S., for example, understands why blacks desperate over the underclass don't want the liquor-and-sundries stores rebuilt. Though he doesn't buy the

metaphor of the KA merchant as drug pusher, he's sympathetic, and though he suspects the alcohol problem is more a question of culture and character than availability, he readily admits that South-Central would probably be better off without a liquor outlet on every corner. But the ordinance mandating community hearings, where the activists will have a field day, is unjust, mischievous. It targets flea markets, as well as liquor stores. Why effectively punish KAs, who weren't breaking the law? If these businesses are to be gotten rid of, their owners should be compensated.

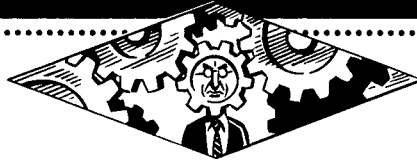
The municipal Community Redevelopment Agency has enough money to compensate the victims from South-Central who weren't insured and really want to go elsewhere. T.S. estimates the amount at \$50 million. Realistically, he doubts whether he or any combination of thirtysomething KAs has the clout to pry that sum from the CRA. Demonstrations of brotherhood may lower the temperature but won't much enhance the chances. There have been inter-

racial, inter-communal parades and meetings in the wake of the riots, church visits and talk show encounters, including some by T.S. himself. Yet he doubts that the fruits of political power can be plucked without the acquisition of that power, something that takes a law-abiding community much time. As a result the KAs may have to bail out their own

*The faith that good Calvinist behavior
at all times would be enough to ensure
protection in a bad time, that political deals
could wait, is probably gone for good.
You hear new buzzwords. Organize!
Register! Pressurize!*

most needy victims, not an impossibility for a community that found \$40 million in its own pockets to spend on building and refurbishing its churches in the last few years.

"Still the most civilized country in the world," the young, temporarily ruined Jin Lee will tell you without a trace of irony. Fewer Korean tourists are coming to L.A. these days, but immigrants are still arriving at LAX and hardly anyone who has settled here is going back, never mind that the South Korean economy is healthier for the moment than the American. Seventy-two hours of chaos and self-defense, a glimpse of Beirut, is enough to re-educate, but far from enough to gut that unique and resilient promise known as America in the eyes of people from elsewhere on the planet. "Can we live together?" the black ex-con arrested by white cops asked while portions of the city went up in flames and the freeways clogged with escapees. T.S. Chung isn't the only one who's agnostic on that ultimate question. There could be a next time later this summer, or not for another twenty-seven years, or never at all. Riots in that respect may be something like earthquakes. Anything is possible, anything but the disappearance of the Kims and the Kings in our midst. □



Tigers by the Tail

by Pete du Pont

Hong Kong

The Washington foreign policy establishment and the press speak warmly of moving from the Cold War into a New World Order—from COMECON, the Warsaw Pact, and SALT to Rio, the G-7, and the EC. The trouble is that, like the Keynesian economists before them, New World Order advocates have trouble fitting the facts into their theory. In this case the facts include Yugoslavia, Tibet, and the recent Danish referendum that threatens to scuttle the “new Europe.” And a visit to three of the “Asian Tigers”—South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong—is enough to convince one that the conventional wisdom on a New World Order, even regarding some of the era’s resounding success stories, is shaky indeed.

South Korea and Taiwan have blossomed under hard work and capitalism. Buildings are going up, traffic clogs the highways, and new business investment is at an all-time high. In thirty years, South Korea’s GNP has gone from \$2 billion to \$28 billion, and the number of cars on its roads from 2,500 to 2.5 million. Taiwan has needed only forty-three years to grow from a militarized agrarian society into a politically pluralistic economic power with the largest foreign reserves of any nation in the world, some \$83 billion.

Yet both countries are burdened by relics of statism that will pose a significant challenge to modernization over

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the next two decades. South Korea is pervasively dominated by *chaebols*, big conglomerates that compete for government financial assistance in a kind of upside-down welfare state. The country is also among the world’s most protectionist. For example, between import and point of sale \$25,600 in taxes and tariffs is added to the \$16,000 base price of a typical American automobile (see table below). It is unlikely that Korea will continue to prosper under protectionism: as impressive as the country’s export performance has been, the tariffs exact a damaging toll on its consumer economy, and one suspects the problem will grow worse as international communications show the Koreans lower-priced consumer goods in other nations. Although there are plans to lower tariffs in coming years, there is no sign that the South Korean government perceives unfree trade as a problem.

Taiwanese leaders, on the other hand, recognize that protectionism hurts their economy. Yet the government still controls the major industries—shipping, steel, chemicals, sugar—and its 1991

six-year plan calls for the practice to continue. Taiwan still depends on government industrial policies to direct development.

Both countries have moved away from the closed politics that marked their early years. In South Korea, Chung Ju Yung, a wealthy industrialist, is making a vigorous third-party run for the presidency. Taiwan’s new Democratic Progressive party is flexing its legislative muscle—quite literally. Riot police had to be called in recently when DPP members of parliament began throwing chairs, bottles, and fists at the prime minister as he gave his annual address to the legislature.

By contrast, Hong Kong, as a British colony, has had a completely closed political system for the last century. Although recent elections for the legislative council provided a whiff of pluralism, Hong Kong will still be a functioning crown colony when it is handed over lock, stock, and barrel to Peking in 1997. This hasn’t stopped Hong Kong from having the most successful economy of the three nations. It has the world’s largest port, its

third largest financial center, and an unemployment rate of just 2 percent, despite having absorbed millions of refugees from Communism over the years.

And if there is a common thread linking the three countries in the 1990s it is Communism—as a practical issue, as a defining ideology, as an imminent threat. New World Order wisdom holds that China is going capitalist and that North Korea will temper

Korea: Taxing a U.S. Automobile

Cost factor	Formula	1991	1992
A. CIF value	Base	16,000	16,000
B. Tariff	A x tariff	3,200*	2,720†
C. Special Excise Tax (SET)	(A + B) x 25%	4,800	4,680
D. Education tax on SET	C x 30%	1,440	1,404
E. Banking, Customs	A x 3%	480	480
F. Distributor cost	A + B + C + D + E	25,920	25,284
G. Distribution Markup	F x 20%	5,184	5,057
H. Value Added Tax	(F + G) x 10%	3,110	3,034
I. Retail Price	F + G + H	34,214	33,375
J. Acquisition Tax	I x 2%	684	668
K. Registration Tax	I x 6%	2,053	2,002
L. Subway Bonds	I x 20%	6,843	6,675
TOTAL CUSTOMER COST	I + J + K + L	43,794	42,720

*20%. †17%.

All prices in U.S. dollars. Source: U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Korea