

Confronting Sa-i-gu: Beyond black-Korean Conflict

Twenty-eight years ago on April 29, civil unrest erupted in Los Angeles and Koreatown cried as it burned. For six-days, the LAPD was missing in action as rioting, looting, burning, and killing devastated the city. The not guilty Rodney King verdict ignited anger and frustration felt by South Los Angeles residents who suffered from years of neglect, despair, hopelessness, injustice, and oppression. In the Korean American community, the Los Angeles civil unrest is remembered as Sa-i-gu (April 29 in Korean). Korean Americans suffered disproportionately high economic losses as 2,280 Korean American businesses were looted or burned with \$400 million in property damages. Without any political clout and power in the city, Koreatown was unprotected and left to burn since it was not a priority for city politicians and the LAPD. For the Korean American community, Sa-i-gu is known as its most important historical event, a “turning point,” “watershed event,” or “wake-up call.” Sa-i-gu profoundly altered the Korean American discourse, igniting debates and dialogue in search of new directions. Many believe that as Los Angeles burned, the Korean American was born-or reborn-on April 29, 1992. The Sa-i-gu served as a catalyst to critically examine what it meant to be Korean American in relation to multicultural politics and race, economics and ideology. In addition, we must critically analyze the current racial protests that have swept across America. How do we center Asian (Korean) American experiences and perspectives and reframe black-white paradigm? How do we reframe theoretical paradigms to include Asian (Korean) American experiences?