

Koreatown's razing was L.A.'s version of Kristallnacht

By **Shawn Steel**

When I returned to work from lunch, my staff already had fled the office. Fires were burning all around our building in Koreatown. I put the telephone on night service, locked the building, and drove immediately between Vermont and Western avenues, where considerable rioting was spreading north.

My neighbor, Phillip, called a meeting of several homeowner association leaders to make plans to protect our homes. Billows of smoke could be seen from our homes less than one mile away at Santa Monica Boulevard and Vermont Avenue. Neighbors agreed that streets needed to be physically blocked from nonresidents, someone asked about guns.

I have not picked up a rifle since Basic Training. Somehow anticipating that it would be foolish not to have a weapon, I recently bought a 9mm pistol. But I had no ammunition. Phillip gave me .22 caliber bullets for another pistol.

When the men on our street got together at dusk Thursday night (April 30), the urban battle was in full fury. Still no police presence, no National Guard. The skyline was ablaze with fires. TV reported that the mobs were literally moving north directly into our neighborhood. First on Santa Monica Boulevard, then Sunset Boulevard, now on Hollywood Boulevard.

Phillip, whose wife is of Japanese ancestry; young Richard, whose mother is Mexican, and my wife, who is Korean, blocked the western opening of our street. Our neighbors on the eastern end, a black couple and a Vietnam vet, also used their cars to barricade the entrance. Our weapons were displayed and we were nervous.

The next day I drove through Koreatown and saw what Berlin must have looked like after the infamous Kristallnacht. Korean businesses of all sorts were pillaged and torched. Diamonds, gold, and furs were systematically looted from Bullock's Wilshire. The arson was deliberate and extensive. More than 1,000 fires were set. More than half the businesses destroyed were Korean-owned. Many of the Korean stores carried no insurance, because it is unaffordable or nonexistent. One black caller gleefully reported on a local radio station that the

violence liberated the black community from the Korean businesses.

I imagine that is exactly the same feeling of rage and pride that the SS must have felt smashing Jewish businesses and terrorizing Jews. Jews suffered pogroms throughout the centuries in Europe with this kind of mob violence. Now we have it in Los Angeles.

What we witnessed in L. A. was the most virulent racist-movement violence in the 100 years since the San Francisco Chinatown riots. This time the specific minority targeted was anyone or anything Korean. That's why federal prosecution for civil rights violations against those who attacked Koreans is necessary, as Sheriff Block said.

Was it class envy? Discourteous businessmen (a horrible racist stereotype)? There is no defense for looting and urban violence. Those involved seem to be young blacks or Latinos. Most probably do not have fathers at home. Most certainly do not have high school degrees. Most do not have much to lose, especially if the police do not act like police.

When criminals are treated like victims and the victims like criminals, then our society is in cultural crisis. Koreans did not create the climate of urban terror. The large criminal underclass in urban America does.

Liberal politicians promised 30 years ago that political power would raise the black community. L.A. now has a black mayor, soon a black police chief, and 20 percent of the City Council is black, "overrepresenting" its black population.

Answers to late 20th century urban terror would have to include: fostering a belief that the nuclear family is essential, the family needing to inculcate values of right and wrong; providing empowerment in school choice by parents so more children can fit in the mainstream; and creating a climate for individual economic empowerment.

Cheyenne, my 5-year-old half-Korean daughter, asked me before the National Guard began arriving in significant numbers: "What are they going to do to us?" I replied, hopefully, that this time the good guys were going to win.

Shawn Steel is an attorney practicing in Koreatown.



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