

CLOSE UP



By KRIS LOVEKIN

Now that "9-11" is shorthand for terrorism, Edward Chang, an associate professor of Ethnic Studies, fears that mainstream American culture has forgotten another important date: April 29, 1992, when fires and chaos broke out in South Central Los Angeles following the acquittal of L.A. police officers charged in the beating of motorist Rodney King.

In Korean, the words, *Sa-l-gu* or "4-29," summons images of burning storefronts, smashed windows and other devastation that disproportionately affected the Korean-American community. For Chang, 4-29 is also shorthand for the important issue of racial injustice. It would be a mistake to forget, he said.

Recognized as a leading expert on the events of April 29, 1992, Chang was quoted extensively in media coverage of the 10th anniversary of the violence. He contended that progress in race relations has not been as fast as predicted, given the extent of the chaos at that time. "The underlying socio-economic factors have not changed at all," he said.

"There has not been major investment in inner city Los Angeles."

He said talks between people of different backgrounds immediately after the unrest did not lead to lasting change, although certainly there is some hope. For instance, he said, relationships between Korean merchants and their African-American customers are better now than they were before the civil unrest.

"Ethnic Peace in the American City," a 1999 book by Chang and co-author Jeannette Diaz-Veizades, examines underlying causes of the riots and suggests some solutions for a more harmonious future.

"The students that I teach today don't even know why it happened," he said. "We need to take more proactive measures, such as focusing on race relations in the school curriculum. We have to get beyond celebrating diversity, and talk about economic and political issues. Our political leaders have to take more chances and invest in economic development."

In 1990, Chang wrote his

Ph.D. dissertation on Korean/African-American relations, little suspecting that just two years later his knowledge would be called upon to help heal broken relationships between Korean immigrant shopkeepers and their mostly African-American clientele in South Central. He put together a book, in Korean, about the culture of African-Americans, about the legacy of slavery and the concept of soul, which translates to "Han" in Korean.

He served as a field reporter and consultant for "LA is Burning: Five Reports from a Divided City," a PBS Frontline special program on the unrest. Since then, Chang's continued research and speaking on matters relating to building peace in interethnic communities has shown that his interest in this subject goes far beyond one of crisis management and beyond the issues of one urban neighborhood.

He is currently working on a project that will preserve the written record of the civil unrest and its aftermath.

Chang was born in Incheon, Korea, where he attended

school through high school. He did his undergraduate work at UC Berkeley, his master's work at UCLA and his doctoral work at Berkeley.

His first teaching job was at Cal Poly Pomona, and, ten years ago, he came to UCR. He teaches two large introductory classes in Ethnic Studies, *Introduction to the Study of Race and Ethnicity* and *Introduction to Asian American Studies in Comparative Perspective* as well as upper-division courses. Chang's wife, Janet, is a professor of social work at Cal State San Bernardino. The couple, who live in Riverside, have a 15-year-old daughter, Angie.