

# KIM'S MONEY TREE

In the Heart of the American Dream





The background of the entire slide is a photograph of the Los Angeles skyline at sunset. The sky is a deep orange and yellow. In the foreground, several palm trees are silhouetted against the bright sky. Four military-style helicopters are flying across the sky at different heights and positions. The city skyline is visible in the background, with various skyscrapers and buildings.

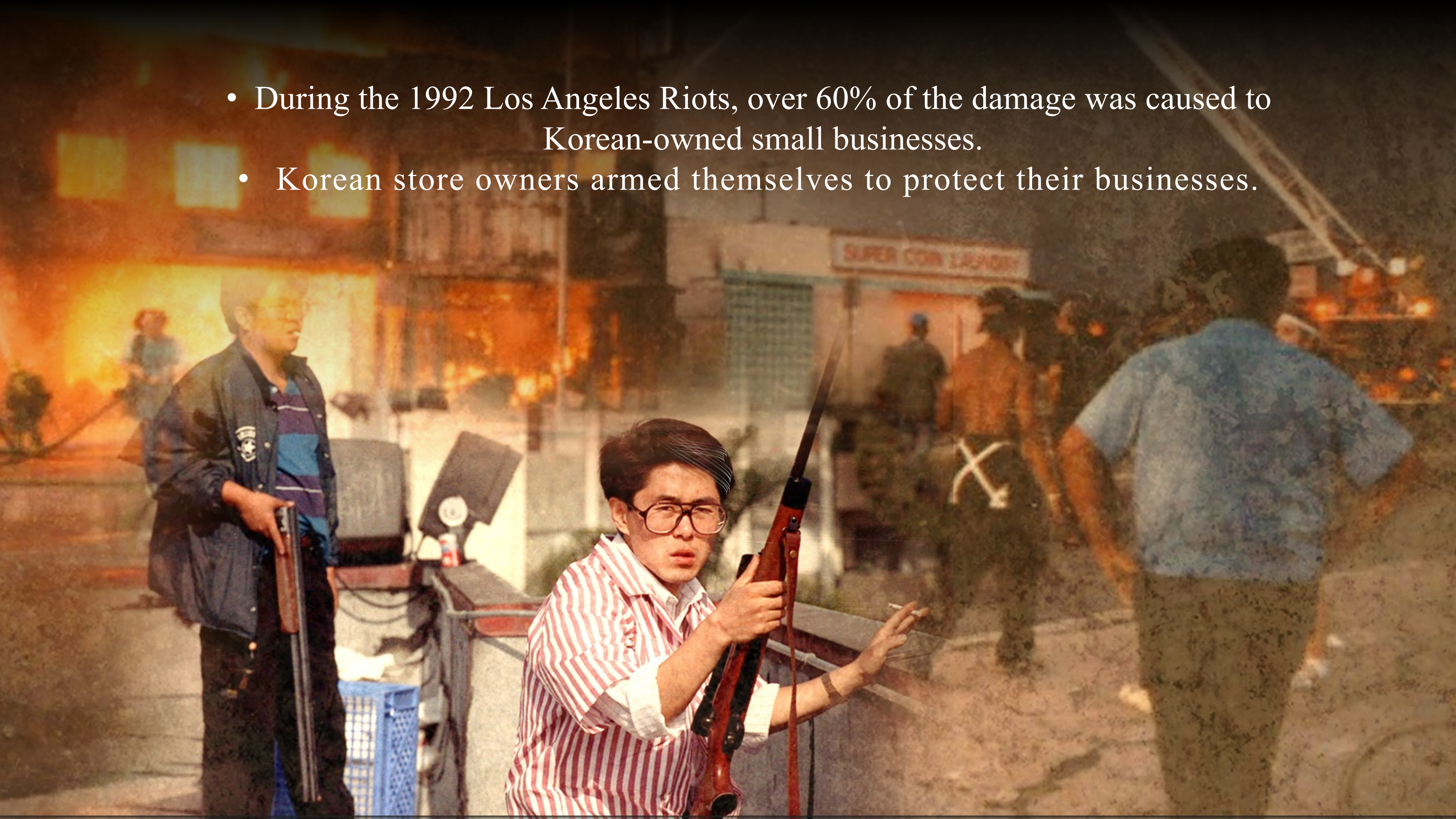
# LOS ANGELES 1992

## LOGLINE

Just before the L.A. Riots,  
a grieving Korean American woman takes over her parents' Korean  
restaurant after a violent robbery, discovers a passion for her mother's  
cooking, and falls for the Mexican chef  
despite her father's opposition.



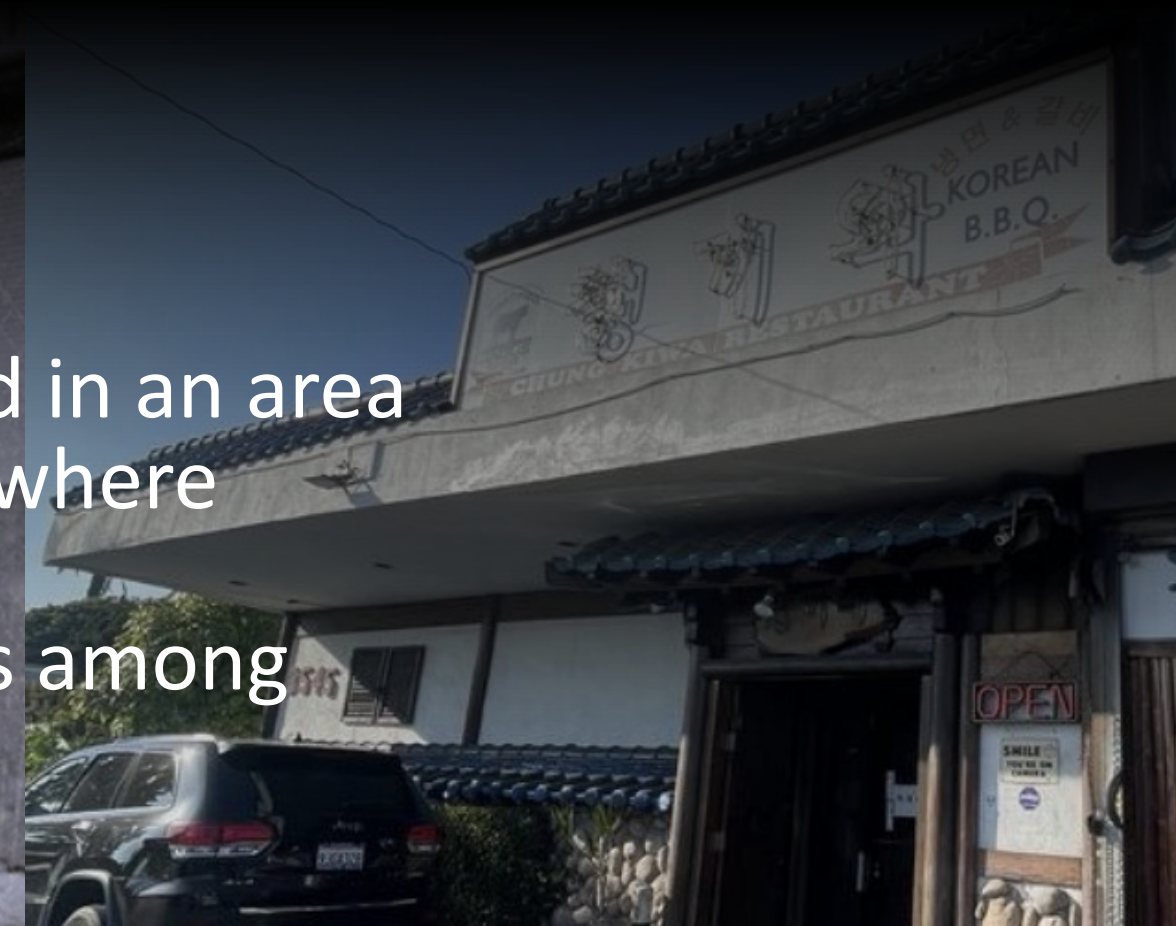
- During the 1992 Los Angeles Riots, over 60% of the damage was caused to Korean-owned small businesses.
- Korean store owners armed themselves to protect their businesses.





## SETTING

The setting is a Korean restaurant in Koreatown, located in an area on the border of Latino and Black neighborhoods where racial tensions are rising — a microcosm of a community's struggle and tensions among minorities before the 1992 L.A. Riots.





A composite image featuring a woman's face on the left, looking slightly upwards with a contemplative expression. On the right, a lush green tree with thick, gnarled branches is shown, bearing numerous glowing gold coins. In the foreground, several tall stacks of gold coins are arranged, with more coins scattered around them. The background is dark, making the glowing elements stand out.

**Magical realism** adds a mystical tone to this gritty social drama.

**Mother's spirit** appears among the grieving family during both joyful and sorrowful moments, while the magical money tree symbolizes the immigrant's resilience and hope.



## SYNOPSIS

"Kim's Money Tree" is a story about a father and daughter, featuring an unexpected romance between a young Korean-American woman and an undocumented Mexican chef, leading up to the 1992 L.A. Riots.

Helen, 21, studies pre-med to meet her parents' American Dream but feels trapped. After a painful argument with her immigrant mother about dropping out, her mother suddenly dies of a heart attack, leaving Helen filled with regret. Struggling with grief, she turns to drugs and alcohol and steals from her father, Kim, 50, who is trying to keep their Korean restaurant afloat after losing his wife, the head chef.

When a robbery leaves Kim hospitalized, Helen must set aside her renewed pre-med plans to save the restaurant. During this journey, guided by Carlos, the Mexican chef, she discovers her passion for cooking while learning her mother's Korean recipes, thus preserving her legacy.

Together, they expand the menu to include Mexican-inspired Korean dishes, which helps drive their financial recovery. Meanwhile, Helen falls in love with Carlos despite her father's disapproval.



*The Mexican chef teaches  
Helen how to make her mother's  
signature dishes including  
kimchi,  
thereby preserving  
her mother's legacy.*







## C H A R C H A C T E R S

### HELEN KIM, 21

Forced to assimilate into mainstream American culture, she was stripped of her Korean language and heritage. She is unhappy with her pre-med studies, disappointing her parents. After her mother's untimely death, however, she feels a deep sense of regret. She tries to cope with her grief through alcohol and drug abuse. However, her journey toward redemption and overcoming her grief begins when she develops a passion for cooking and falls in love with the Mexican chef who shares her mother's recipes.





## Carlos Garcia, 20s

A street-wise, spiritual, insightful, and undocumented Mexican man came to America seeking a better life. While working as a Chef in Koreatown, he learned to speak basic Korean. He understands Helen's pain of losing her mother, whom he regards as his master, and teaches Helen her mother's secret menu while grappling with his feelings for his master's daughter.

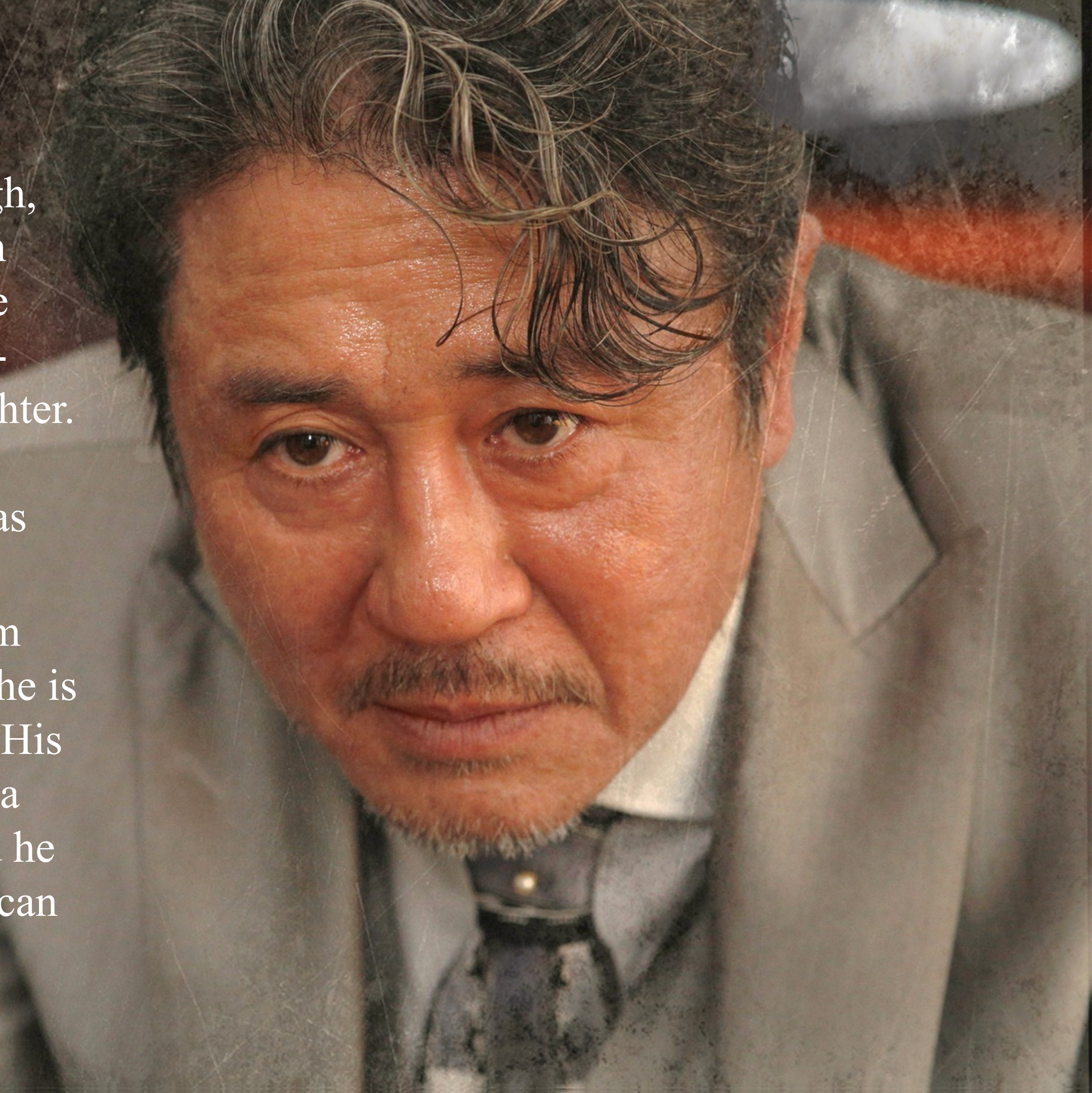


## MR. Kim, 50

A proud Korean immigrant, he is a tough, self-made businessman whose Korean restaurant represents his version of the American Dream. He is stubborn, hot-tempered, and authoritarian with his daughter.

Additionally, he mistrusts his Latino employees and Blacks, a feeling that has grown since a violent robbery.

A former Korean Marine and Vietnam Veteran values loyalty and kinship, and he is devoted to caring for his aging mother. His daughter, his only hope, has become a constant source of disappointment, and he pressures her to pursue his ideal American Dream of achieving success in mainstream America.







## CYNTHIA JONES, 42

A no-nonsense Black mail carrier observes the daily challenges and struggles faced by Korean immigrants amid rising racial tensions leading up to the L.A. Riots. She possesses a wry sense of humor and has a deep understanding of the moral and ethical principles in the Koreatown community she serves. Despite her often sarcastic remarks, her caring nature helps bridge the gap with Kim, overcoming his bigotry.



# COMPARABLE FILMS





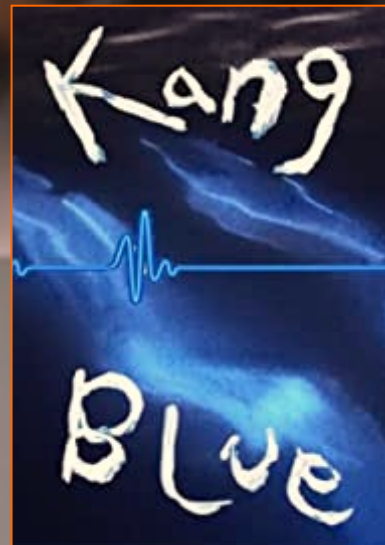
# KYUNG-JA (KJ) LEE

## Writer/Director

Lee obtained her Master's degree in directing at AFI with an award winning short film "*Halmani*."

Lee continued her independent filmmaking career and received numerous awards and fellowships, including the Rockefeller Foundation Asian Artist Fellowship, Sundance Screenwriters Lab, Producers Guild of America Diversity Fellowship, Film Independent's Project Involve, and was in development with HBO Pictures as the writer/director of her feature project "Koreatown Blues."

Lee wrote and directed five short films that were screened at various film festivals, and her latest short, "Kang Blue," was awarded Outstanding Female Filmmaker at the Katra Film Series. Lee is currently developing several feature and short projects, including a social drama, "Kim's Money Tree," a poetic supernatural horror, "The Weeping Chime," and a contest-winning short screenplay, including Slamdance, "The Comfort Woman Statue."



TEAM BIO





# CHARLES BURNETT

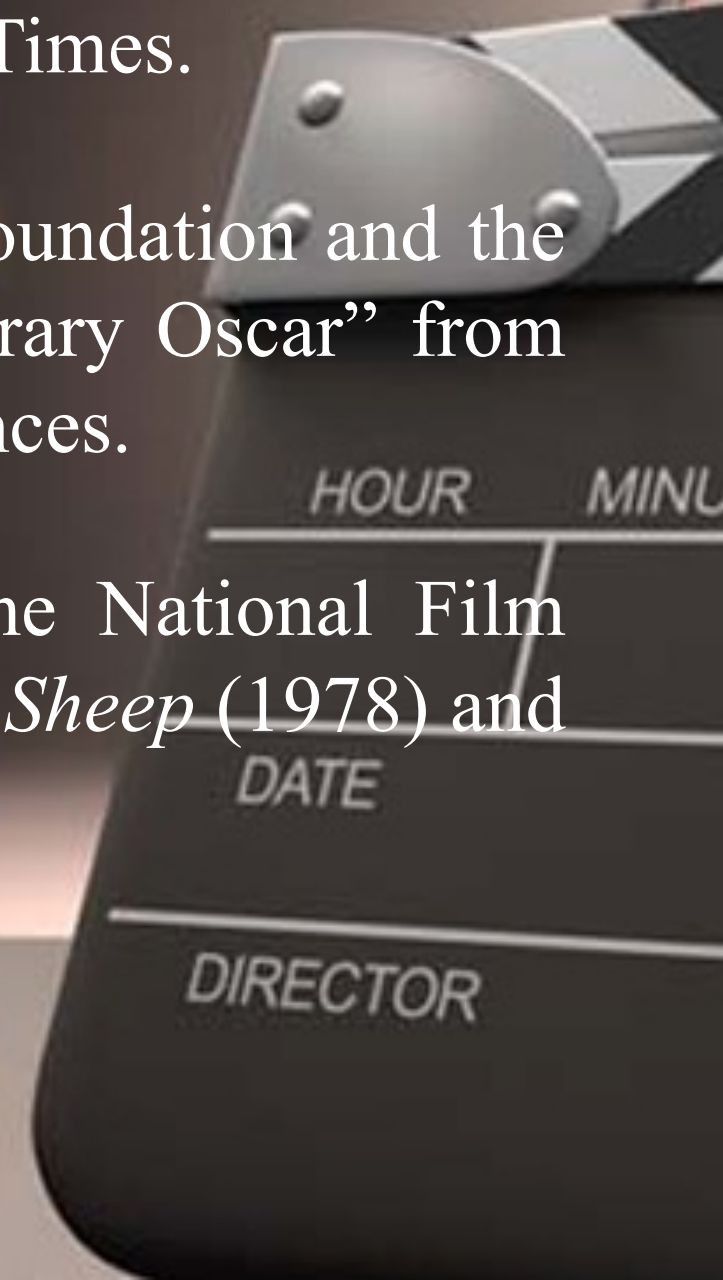
Adviser

Called "one of America's very best filmmakers" by the Chicago Tribune and "the nation's least-known great filmmaker and most gifted black director" by The New York Times.

Recipient of MacArthur Fellowship, Getty Foundation and the Guggenheim Fellowship. Received an "honorary Oscar" from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Two of his films have been selected for the National Film Registry by the Library of Congress: *Killer of Sheep* (1978) and *To Sleep with Anger* (1990).

T E A M   B I O







# WRITER/DIRECTOR STATEMENT

As a Korean-American filmmaker, my objective is to express a unique vision through my bicultural backgrounds about the Asian American experience in particular.

My stories draw inspiration from genuine historical events and cultural customs. They portray the challenges and obstacles faced by various minority groups, blending magical realism with raw reality to create hauntingly beautiful imagery.

I want to tell stories that transgress cultural boundaries and lead to a greater understanding between various ethnicities. Despite over 30 years having passed since the L.A. Riots, similarities still exist between the issues raised in this story and what is happening today in America. This lends the narrative a unique relevance and significance that resonates with today's audience.






# CONTACT US

KYUNG-JA (KJ) LEE

WRITER/DIRECTOR

 [kj-film.com](http://kj-film.com)

 [kjlee1659@gmail.com](mailto:kjlee1659@gmail.com)