

**MEMORANDUM****PRIVILEGED AND CONFIDENTIAL ATTORNEY/CLIENT COMMUNICATION**  
**ATTORNEY WORK PRODUCT**

To: Richard J. Stone  
General Counsel and  
Staff Director

From: Helen Jorda, Counsel  
Brad Pomerance, Counsel

Date: July 16, 1992

Re: Interview Abstract of Jay Rhee

The interview of Jay Rhee provided insight into the Korean community's perception of the unrest following the Rodney King verdict. Mr. Rhee armed himself for the first time to protect the store where he works, an electronics shop on Santa Monica and Vermont called Hollytron. He and five or six other armed employees held hundreds of looters at bay and protected the store while others around them were looted and burned.

Mr. Rhee felt that the Los Angeles Police Department could not be relied on to protect the Korean community and that they had to take law enforcement into their own hands. The police response was practically non-existent. Mr. Rhee knew of no preparation by the LAPD and no intelligence within the Korean community. The media played up tension between the Korean community and African-American communities which Mr. Rhee does not think exists. He stated based on his observations that 90% of the looters in Koreatown and Hollywood were Hispanic.

Mr. Rhee has become somewhat of a reluctant spokesperson for the Korean community. His recommendations for improvements are more Korean-American police officers, a centralized police station in Koreatown, more communications between the police and the Korean community, more Korean representation in government and the media, and a return to "family values."

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On July 2, 1992 at 7:00 p.m. at Hollytron Electronics Store ("Hollytron") at Santa Monica Boulevard and Vermont in Los Angeles we interviewed Jay Rhee at his place of employment. The following is a summary of our recollections of this meeting, including our questions and comments, together with our mental impressions, conclusions and opinions based upon the meeting.

The most significant theme throughout the interview was the inadequacy of the police response to the looting taking place in Koreatown and Hollywood. Mr. Rhee and other employees of Hollytron protected the store with guns during the unrest following the April 29 Rodney King verdict. Mr. Rhee offered an in-depth perspective of the Korean perspective on these events.

I. Background Information.

Jay Rhee was born in South Korea. He is a 34 year old Canadian citizen who has been in Los Angeles for one year. In 1974 he emigrated to Canada with his family where he studied computer science at the University of Toronto. He is in the import-export business, and is also employed as assistant sales manager for TV and audio appliances at Hollytron. Prior to the recent events, he was not a vocal member of the Korean community. Since then, he has become a spokesperson of sorts and has appeared on TV, including on local news and the Phil Donahue Show, to discuss the Korean response to the unrest. Mr. Rhee lives in Koreatown at New Hampshire and 8th; he has a business in that neighborhood where his wife works, and he works at Hollytron, located at the corner of Vermont and Santa Monica.

Mr. Rhee was a reluctant participant in the events following the Rodney King verdict. When he and his wife woke up on April 30 and heard gunshots and helicopters and turned on the TV, his



wife's immediate reaction was that they had to leave town and go to her sister's home in Downey. Mr. Rhee refused and his wife walked out on him. He spent the rest of the time shuttling back and forth between his residence, his import-export business, and Hollytron. He got a good view of the looting and fires in the area between Koreatown and Hollywood. He protected Hollytron throughout the unrest. Although he had never held a gun before in his life, he felt it was necessary to protect himself and the store.

At approximately 9:00 a.m. he travelled from Koreatown to Vermont and Santa Monica and saw many looters. All of the plazas on Vermont had been looted unless there was a security guard. It appeared that jewelry shops, pawn shops and electronics shops were targeted. He did not believe that it was specifically Korean shops; the looters did not know who the owners of these shops were, and they had 50% non-Korean employees.

When he arrived at Hollytron at approximately 9:30 a.m., the owner decided to close the store. There was an employee on the roof and he wanted a gun. Mr. Rhee had a ham radio. The general feeling was that there was a serious situation going on. The plaza was quiet but tense. Mr. Rhee was scared.

At about 10:30 a.m. he saw the Vons at 3rd and Vermont looted and an apartment building burning. There were no police, and people were throwing stones and bottles. He also saw a fire at New Hampshire and 3rd but, again, no police. He went back to his apartment and store and saw stores burning and looted at 8th and Vermont. It was very scary at that time.

When he went back to Hollytron at 11:00 a.m., Vermont was blocked. There were few police and no National Guard. At Hollytron there were six or seven employees with three handguns and one rifle. Six or seven hundred people were surrounding the store. Mr. Rhee shouted at the people to get out; he shouted so much that he lost this voice. He pointed at them with his gun, but did not fire.

At 1:30 p.m., there were gunshots on Santa Monica. They blocked the Hollytron front door with cars and fired guns in the air. At 2:30 p.m. the police came, but they promptly left. The Hollytron employees tried to call the police all day long, but they either were unable to get through or a report was taken and the police did not promise to come. When the police came they did not do anything. There was a lot of gunfire, and cars in the parking lot were hit. There were people circling the parking lot in cars with guns.

The Hollytron employees put a truck at the Santa Monica Boulevard entrance to the shopping plaza. It was burned by looters and the fire was put out with a fire extinguisher.



Mr. Rhee stayed at Hollytron on Thursday night with approximately five other people. There were still people on the street despite the curfew, although there were probably less than 100 at this point. There was a Payless Shoe store in the Hollytron plaza. When Mr. Rhee saw people trying to get into Payless he and a security guard ran down there. There were four or five people looting the store. Mr. Rhee turned the lights on and fought with the looters. The looters were armed with sticks and knives. Mr. Rhee and the security guard from Hollytron did a citizen's arrest. The looters torched the store and the people from the street started moving in and shouting. Mr. Rhee fired shots in the air and they moved back. Mr. Rhee tied the hands of the arsonists and laid them down in the parking lot. The police came after he called them on the ham radio and took them away. They were Hispanics and they apologized for doing what they did. Payless burned down. The fire department let the store burn down. Mr. Rhee gave interviews to local TV regarding the incident.

There were never any National Guard in the Hollytron parking lot. There were very few National Guard on Vermont. At 9:30 p.m. on Thursday after the fire was out at Payless things got quieter.

On May 1, Mr. Rhee was arrested for carrying the handgun he protected Hollytron with. The police were very tough on him and he was very upset. He lied to the police that he had a license for the gun. He was on the ground, handcuffed, and his gun was confiscated. A lot of Koreans were taken away, especially those who could not speak English. However, he was let go and was not booked. His wife, who was still in Downey, saw him on TV on the ground with handcuffs. Mr. Rhee was outraged that after all of the violence and lack of police response, he was arrested.

After all of this happened, he was contacted by various media to go on television. Management of Hollytron, his family and friends did not want him to go on Donahue, however he felt it was important that he did.

## II. Anticipation of Verdict.

Mr. Rhee works with a group of volunteer citizens who work with the police department and have a van that patrols Korean neighborhoods. The group is called Korean Community Watch. He goes out every Friday night with the police at the Wilshire Station. In this work and his general knowledge he says that no consideration was given prior to the verdict of the possibility of rioting. There was no communication from his perspective with the Korean-American community about what to do in the event of rioting.

### III. Intelligence.

As far as Mr. Rhee knows, there was no intelligence between the Korean-American community and the police regarding potential rioting.

### IV. Planning.

Mr. Rhee is not aware of any planning that went on to prepare for the unrest following the verdict. This was the case even though the media had escalated the tension between the Korean and black communities.

### V. Effects of Political Atmosphere and Pre-Verdict Comments.

Although Mr. Rhee does not believe that the Sun Jah Du case had anything to do with the rioting, it did cause a heightened tension between the black and Korean communities. Mr. Rhee believes that this was mostly the focus of the media, and played up the new-found wealth of the Korean-American community versus the poverty of certain parts of the black community.

### VI. Adequacy of Police Response.

Mr. Rhee believes that the response of the LAPD was inadequate; they neglected their job. He believes that when the National Guard did actually come they went to Beverly Hills and other wealthy communities. He was very upset about this. Although he believes that the police had a hard time he also thinks that they did not care. There were too few police in high crime areas such as Koreatown.

Mr. Rhee travelled between Hollytron and his home in Koreatown many times on April 30 and the rest of the weekend. He saw very few police and no National Guard. One of the Hollytron employees called 911 non-stop starting at 9:00 a.m. on April 30. He reported that they were in distress and were surrounded by a mob. The police did not promise to come. At one point, the police circled the Hollytron parking lot and then left. At another, they came with three or four cars and a few motorcycles. People started shooting at the police. The police told the Hollytron employees that they did not know where the National Guard was and then left. Later in the afternoon the police came with helmets and guns; they watched the action but did not do anything. The crowds would disperse when the police were there, but came back as soon as they left.

During the night on April 30 there were no police around. At 9:00 p.m. Mr. Rhee and the security guard from Hollytron caught looters who had charged a Payless Shoe Store in the same shopping plaza. They called the police by ham radio and they



responded immediately and took the two looters away. Mr. Rhee stated that it was the people who stayed and guarded their own stores that survived. Those who left got burned out. They could not rely on the LAPD or the National Guard.

#### VII. Nature of Violence.

Mr. Rhee stated that 90% of the looters were Hispanic; there were very few African-Americans. There were no Korean looters. His view is that the looters were irresponsible, immoral and ruthless. He believes that the rioters were like animals and did not know the difference between right and wrong. They had no "value of life." For the looters it was a festival, there was a party mood. He saw Hispanic women and kids looting everything from jewelry shops to flower shops and donut shops. He stated that the Koreans were raised differently. He believes that Dan Quayle was right about family values and that the Koreans have very strong family values.

#### VIII. Lessons Learned.

Mr. Rhee believes that the Rodney King verdict was outrageous and it should not have happened in America. He also believes that the justice system is falling apart. He believes he can understand how the black community feels because he has been discriminated against as a Korean in a white-dominant society.

If the police would have stopped the rioting where it started, maybe things would not have spread so much. Daryl Gates was clearly responsible. It was outrageous that he went to dinner in Beverly Hills after the verdict. It also did not help that the Mayor did not talk to Daryl Gates for thirteen months. Tom Bradley is doing a good job.

One of the problems is that there is no voice for Korean-Americans in this country. They have no representatives because they are taught to work hard and keep a low profile to achieve the American dream. However, the Koreans are tough. Their country has been attacked many times by Japan and China. They never attacked anyone. They have had it hard and they are survivors. However, Mr. Rhee has learned that it is important for Koreans to speak up when they think they are being unfairly portrayed or discriminated against.

#### IX. Recommendations for Improvement.

Mr. Rhee believes that more police are needed in South Central and Koreatown which have very high crime rates. As it stands now, the police do not respond if there is a robbery in Koreatown. If someone is hurt, however, they will call an ambulance. As taxpayers he believes that the Koreans have a

right to police. The police should come to any crime scene and make a report.

The way it is set up now, there are two police stations which serve Koreatown, the Wilshire Division and the Rampart Division. The Rampart police do not cross Normandie. This makes for an awkward situation. He thinks that the Korean volunteer group which he belongs to is a good idea and should be used more to protect the community. He believes that things would improve if there were more Korean-American police in Koreatown.

IX. Use of Interviewee At Any Public Hearing.

Mr. Rhee is articulate, speaks English well, and is very presentable. He has been before the media quite a bit since April 29, including on local news and the Phil Donahue Show. He would make a good spokesperson for the Korean community and would be good at any public hearing.