The 1992 Los Angeles riots may arguably be the turn-of-the-twentieth-century incident in US history that garnered the biggest public attention in South Korea. Headed by major newspapers and broadcasts, the Korean reportage on the LA riots brought to light the intimate connection between the two countries as Koreans in South Korea worried about the safety and welfare of their family and relatives in the US. Min Hyoung Song’s Strange Future: Pessimism and the 1992 Los Angeles Riots and Nadia Y. Kim’s Imperial Citizens: Koreans and Race from Seoul to LA, two recent books born out of enduring critical engagement with the 1992 LA riots and their repercussions, provide an apt occasion for revisiting the social and cultural significance of
the LA riots and for examining the transnational circulation of ideas of race mediated by such events.

Describing the LA riots as “a cultural–literary event,” in excess of just “a historical event,” Song reads an array of literary texts and films—ranging from texts that immediately relate to the LA riots, such as Anna Deavere Smith’s *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, to texts whose connection has to be more subtly drawn out, such as Ray Bradbury’s *The Martian Chronicles*—to draw out the social forces that converged into the riots and to show the cultural imaginary that sprung from the same events.1) His attention to “the presence of the strange”—his name for “the bearers of a materiality that demands narrative invention”—in the texts he analyzes both exposes a post–civil rights, neoconservative narrative of “national decline,” which bemoans the passing of a homogenous national identity, and gestures toward the critical need of constructing a counternarrative.2) By keeping his focus adamantly local, Song succeeds in showing the seminal place of the LA riots in post–1965 social and cultural narratives of race relations.

While the ramifications of the LA riots Song elucidates are national in scope, his study particularly delves into the story of Korean Americans. Korean Americans received media spotlight for the first time in 1992 as the media sensationalized the conflict between Korean small business owners and their black clientele in South Central Los Angeles. Korean Americans became, in Song’s words, “a spectacle without precedent” as the larger social and economic questions that fueled the riots were displaced into a narrative of Korean racism toward blacks and black criminality.3) Song’s engagement with Dai Sil

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1) Song, *Strange Future*, 3.
2) Ibid., 3, 212–213.