

Latin Heart, Korean Yeong-Ung

Roughly 920,000 Koreans were born outside of the East Asian peninsula nation they call home. This haunting message opened documentarian and film director Joseph Juhn's 2019 piece titled *Jeronimo*. Those words also established the tone of mystery and incognito the rest of the film wore in its descriptions of Korea's painful history -- including its independence and division. Underlying the bigger picture of Korean diaspora, the movie tells the story of its eponymous farmer-turned-political activist, and how Jeronimo Lim Kim became a defining figure in the timeline of Korean society as a secret weapon. Above all, Juhn's mind-bending and fascinating documentary showed the world how impactful Koreans were in the shaping of recent events in global history.

In order to understand Jeronimo's journey and Korean diaspora during the 20th Century, much historical context is needed. The story began in Hawaii, where in two years' time, the island chain's Korean population increased 70 times over, due to Korea's tumultuous political atmosphere at the time. In 2010, Japan officially annexed Korea after decades of escalating Korean political and economic integration into Japanese control. Thousands of Koreans secretly travelled to the Caribbean, assuming its living environment was extremely similar to America's. The documentary corroborated this scenario by showing photographs of misleading newspaper clippings that advertised farming jobs in Cuba.

Cheontaek Lim, Jeronimo's father, was one Korean who moved from Mexico to Cuba after withstanding unbearable conditions in the former, but the Henequen farms didn't prove to be much more favorable. In 1926, Cheontaek and his wife bore their first child, Jeronimo Lim Kim. Like his father, Jeronimo worked tirelessly on the Henequen fields for miniscule wage, most of which the Korean Henequen farmers would use to fund efforts for Korean independence by the Provisional Government of Korea. So while Jeronimo was harvesting cacti on the farms in Cuba, he was already planting a different kind of seeds for revolution and national heroism.

As he grew through his late teenage years, Jeronimo studied hard and was eventually accepted into Havana University, an achievement he gained much praise for, since he was the first Korean to be admitted into college in Cuba. Unfortunately, not long after Korean independence from Japan (only about 30 years later), the Korean War devastated its people and the North and South were divided for the first time by the 38th Parallel. At this point, frustrated that Korean natives weren't able to predict such an occurrence, Jeronimo and his fellow Koreans in Cuba diverted their attention from Korea to activities in the place they lived in.

Over the years, Jeronimo fought for his country's independence, helped overthrow the corrupt government of his Latin American homeland, headed a department of Che Guevara's Cabinet, and built structures to commemorate the mark Korean immigration had left on Cuba. At the end of the day, Jeronimo was a national hero who dedicated his life to fighting for his people, stood against unrighteousness, and brought two sides of the world together by his hand of sway.