Twilight
Los Angeles, 1992 On the Road: A Search for American Character
Anna Deavere Smith
Introduction

In May 1992 I was commissioned by Gordon Davidson, artistic director/producer of the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, to create a one-woman performance piece about the civil disturbances in that city in April 1992. For over ten years now I have been creating performances based on actual events in a series I have titled On the Road: A Search for American Character. Each On the Road performance evolves from interviews I conduct with individuals directly or indirectly involved in the event I intend to explore. Basing my scripts entirely on this interview material, I perform the interviewees on stage using their own words. Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992 is the product of my search for the character of Los Angeles in the wake of the initial Rodney King verdict.

In the course of my research for the play I interviewed about two hundred people. Due to time restrictions, however, the number of people I was able to portray on stage was limited to about twenty-five. This book includes some of the material I performed both in the play's Los Angeles version for the Taper and in the version presented at the New York Shakespeare Festival. It includes additional interviews that were not included in the stage versions, which I hope will enrich the reader's understanding of the conflicts that erupted on April 29, 1992. For those who both see the play and read the book, I hope the book can serve as a companion to the theater experience.
The story of how Los Angeles came to experience what some call the worst riots in United States history is by now familiar. In the Spring of 1991, Rodney King, a black man, was severely beaten by four white Los Angeles police officers after a high-speed chase in which King was pursued for speeding. A nearby resident videotaped the beating from the balcony of his apartment. When the videotape was broadcast on national television, there was an immediate outcry from the community. The next year, the police officers who beat King were tried and found not guilty—and the city exploded. The verdict took the city by surprise, from public officials to average citizens. Even the defense lawyers, I was told, anticipated that there would be some convictions. Three days of burning, looting, and killing scarred Los Angeles and captured the attention of the world.

That is the extent of what most Americans understand to have caused what, depending on your point of view, would be variously referred to as a "riot," an "uprising," and/or a "rebellion." But beneath this surface explanation is a sea of associated causes. The worsening California economy and the deterioration of social services and public education in Los Angeles certainly paved the way to unrest. In 1965 President Lyndon Johnson convened the Kerner Commission to examine the causes of riots that shook more than 150 American cities in 1967. The commission's report highlighted urban ills and the plight of the urban poor. Yet more than twenty years later, living conditions for blacks and Latinos in Los Angeles have hardly improved, and Rodney King's beating was only the most visible example of years of police brutality toward people of color. The Watts riots, for example, were sparked by an altercation between a black man and the LAPD. In a speech given at the First African Methodist Episcopal Church in Los Angeles, California Congresswoman Maxine Waters spoke vividly about the legacy of the Watts riots:

There was an insurrection in this city before, and, if I remember correctly, it was sparked by police brutality. We had a Kerner Commission report. It talked about what was wrong with our society. It talked about institutionalized racism. It talked about a lack of services, lack of government responsiveness to the people. Today, as we stand here in 1992, if you go back and read the report, it seems as though we are talking about what that report cited some twenty years ago, still exists today.

The police officers who beat Rodney King were tried in Simi Valley, miles away from the social, economic, and racial problems in Los Angeles. More important, they were miles away from what many residents of the epicenter of the riots, South-Central L.A., would call a war between residents and police officers. When I visited the quiet, predominantly white suburban community of Simi Valley, I began to perceive how profoundly different our experiences of law enforcement can be. For jurors in Simi Valley, Rodney King appeared to be a threat to the police. Moreover, he had been speeding. The officers were, as far as they were concerned, enforcing the law. Police
officers reportedly concluded that King was on the drug PCP, impervious to pain, and therefore not responding to the beating. On the other hand, when I interviewed Rodney King’s aunt, she burst into tears as she recounted seeing the beating on television, and “hearing him holler.” She heard King’s cries the first time she saw the tape. Yet a juror in the federal civil rights trial against the officers who also heard King’s reaction to the police blows told me that the rest of the jury had difficulty hearing what she and King’s aunt had heard. But when, during deliberations, they focused on the audio rather than the video image, their perspective changed. The physical image of Rodney King had to be taken away for them to agree that he was in pain and responding to the beating.

Although I did not attend the original trial in Simi Valley, I did attend the subsequent federal civil rights trial. There, I was able to imagine how such a jury could become convinced that, although the beating seemed brutal to any layman, it was, according to the defense, within the guidelines of the LAPD use-of-force policy. Moreover, I came to observe that some people are effected by the power of what District Attorney Gil Garcetti would describe as the “aura” and “magic” of the police, especially when police officers come to court. There they appeared polite, well groomed, and ready to “protect and serve.” This image differed radically from the image of police conveyed to me by Michael Zinzun, a community activist and chairperson of the South-Central-based Coalition Against Police Abuse. The walls of his office were covered with blown-up photographs of people who had been beaten by police—bruised, bloodied, maimed. Zinzun himself had won a case against the city because he had been blinded when he attempted to intervene in a police beating of someone in his community.

The video of the Rodney King beating, which seemed to “tell all,” apparently did not tell enough, and the prosecution lost, as their lead attorney told me, “the slam-dunk case of the century.” The city of Los Angeles lost much more. Twilight is an attempt to explore the shades of that loss. It is not really an attempt to find causes or to show where responsibility was lacking. That would be the task of a commission report. While I was in Los Angeles, and when I have returned since my initial performance of Twilight in the summer of 1993, I have been trying to look at the shifts in attitudes of citizens toward race relations. I have been particularly interested in the opportunity the events in Los Angeles give us to take stock of how the race canvas in America has changed since the Watts riots. Los Angeles shows us that the story of race in America is much larger and more complex than a story of black and white. There are new players in the race drama. Whereas Jewish merchants were hit during the Watts riots, Korean merchants were hit this time. Although the media tended to focus on blacks in South-Central, the Latino population was equally involved. We tend to think of race as us and them—us or them being black or white depending on one’s own color. The relationships among peoples of color and within racial groups are getting more and more complicated.

Where does theater fit into this? Theater can mirror society. But in order to do that theater must embrace diversity. It must include new characters in our human drama that have not been portrayed on our stages. Clearly even white mainstream theater could be more interesting, and more honest, if people of color were integrated into the drama rather than used as walk-on stereotypes. We now have the opportunity to be a part of the discovery of a larger, healthier, more interesting picture of America. I went to Los Angeles as part of this
process, to listen to those who had lived through the disturbances and to reiterate their voices in the theater. I have felt in this project, more than once, an increased humility, and a greater understanding of the limitations of theater to reflect society. In developing the On the Road project, it was my goal to develop a kind of theater that could be more sensitive to the events of my own time than traditional theater could. This book is a part of that quest.

The challenge of creating On the Road works is to select the voices that best represent the event I hope to portray. Twilight was a particular challenge in this regard due to the number and the diversity of the voices I had gathered through interviews. I had made decisions as to which interviews to include on my own. However, since Fires in the Mirror, I have found it helpful to include more people in the creative process. I developed Twilight at the Mark Taper Forum in collaboration with four other people of various races who functioned as dramaturges (a dramaturge is a person who assists in the preparation of the text of a play and can offer an outside perspective to those who are more active in the process of staging the play). These dramaturges brought their own real-world experiences with race to bear on the work. They reacted to Twilight at every stage of its development.

My predominant concern about the creation of Twilight was that my own history, which is a history of race as a black and white struggle, would make the work narrower than it should be. For this reason, I sought out dramaturges who had very developed careers and identities, outside the theater profession. I was interested not only in their ethnic diversity, but in the diversity that they would bring to the project in terms of areas of expertise. I am a strong critic of the insularity of people in theater and of our inability to shake up our traditions, particularly with regard to race and representation issues. An issue that is at the heart of many theater conferences and gatherings is the need to make theater a more responsible partner in the growth of communities.

Among the people I asked to join me were Dorinne Kondo, a Japanese American anthropologist and feminist scholar; Hector Tobar, a Guatemalan-American reporter from the Los Angeles Times who had covered the riots; and the African American poet and University of Chicago professor Elizabeth Alexander. Oskar Eustis, a resident director at the Taper, also joined the dramaturgical team.

After every performance during previews, I met with the dramaturges and with the director and members of the staff of the Taper. Many of the meetings were very emotional. They were dramas in and of themselves. The most outspoken members of the group were Dorinne and Hector. They passionately attacked the black-and-white canvas that most of us in the room were inclined to perpetuate.

After my work at the Taper, and in revising the text for the New York production, I went to the Rockefeller Foundation’s Study and Conference Center in Bellagio, Italy, to work with my acting coach, Merry Conway, who has been working with me at various times during the development of On the Road since its beginnings. The bottom line of my choice in material for a text is what happens when I actually act the material. Merry and I worked on a lot of material that never appeared in the play in any production, but which does appear in this book. What most influences my decisions about what to include is how an interview text works as a physical, audible, performable vehicle. Words are not an end in themselves. They are a means...
to evoking the character of the person who spoke them. Every person that I include in the book, and who I perform, has a presence that is much more important than the information they give.

This book is first and foremost a document of what an actress heard in Los Angeles. The performance is a reiteration of that. When I did my research in Los Angeles, I was listening with an ear that was trained to hear stories for the specific purpose of repeating them with the elements of character intact. This becomes significant because sometimes there is the expectation that inasmuch as I am doing “social dramas,” I am looking for solutions to social problems. In fact, though, I am looking at the processes of the problems. Acting is a constant process of becoming something. It is not a result, it is not an answer. It is not a solution. I am first looking for the humanness inside the problems, or the crises. The spoken word is evidence of the humanness. Perhaps the solutions come somewhere further down the road.

I see the work as a call. I played Twilight in Los Angeles as a call to the community. I performed it at a time when the community had not yet resolved the problems. I wanted to be a part of their examination of the problems. I believe that solutions to these problems will call for the participation of large and eclectic groups of people. I also believe that we are at a stage at which we must first break the silence about race and encourage many more people to participate in the dialogue.

One of the questions I was frequently asked when I was interviewed about Twilight was “Did you find any one voice that could speak for the entire city?” I think there is an expectation that in this diverse city, and in this diverse nation, a unifying voice would bring increased understanding and put us on the road to solutions. This expectation surprises me. There is little in culture or education that encourages the development of a unifying voice. In order to have real unity, all voices would have to first be heard or at least represented. Many of us who work in race relations do so from the point of view of our own ethnicity. This very fact inhibits our ability to hear more voices than those that are closest to us in proximity. Few people speak a language about race that is not their own. If more of us could actually speak from another point of view, like speaking another language, we could accelerate the flow of ideas.

The boundaries of ethnicity do yield brilliant work. In some cases these boundaries provide safer places that allow us to work in atmospheres where we are supported and can support the works of others. In some cases it's very exciting to work with like-minded people in similar fields of interest. In other cases these boundaries have been crucial to the development of identity and the only conceivable response to a popular culture and a mainstream that denied the possibility of the development of identity. On the other hand the price we pay is that few of us can really look at the story of race in its complexity and its scope. If we were able to move more frequently beyond these boundaries, we would develop multifaceted identities and we would develop a more complex language. After all, identity is in some ways a process toward character. It is not character itself. It is not fixed. Our race dialogue desperately needs this more complex language. The words of Twilight, the ex-gang member after whom I named the play, addresses this need:

Twilight is that time of day between day and night limbo, I call it limbo, and sometimes when I take my ideas to my homeboys

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they say, well Twilight, that's something you can't do right now,
that's an idea before its time.
So sometimes I feel as though I'm stuck in limbo
the way the sun is stuck between night and day
in the twilight hours.
Nighttime to me is like a lack of sun,
but I don't affiliate darkness with anything negative.
I affiliate darkness with what came first,
because it was first,
and relative to my complexion,
I am a dark individual
and with me being stuck in limbo
I see the darkness as myself.
And I see the light as the knowledge and the wisdom of the
world, and the understanding of others.
And I know
that in order for me to be a full human being
I cannot forever dwell in darkness
I cannot forever dwell in idea
of identifying with those like me
and understanding only me and mine.

Twilight's recognition that we must reach across ethnic bound-
aries is simple but true.

Production History

Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992 was conceived, written, and per-
formed by Anna Deavere Smith. It was originally produced by
the Center Theatre Group/Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles:
Gordon Davidson, artistic director/producer, and Emily Mann,
director.

It premiered on May 23, 1993, and closed on July 18,
1993. It was subsequently produced as a work in progress at
the McCarter Theatre in Princeton, New Jersey.

Twilight's original New York production was provided by
the New York Shakespeare Festival. George C. Wolfe, pro-
ducer.

It opened at the New York Shakespeare Festival in March
1994 and was directed by George C. Wolfe.

All material is taken from interviews conducted by Anna
Deavere Smith.

At the Mark Taper Forum, Charles Dillingham served as
managing director and Robert Egan as producing director.
Robert Brill designed the set; Candice Donnelly, the cos-
tumes; Allen Lee Hughes, the lighting; Lucia Hwong, the origi-
nal music score; Jon Gottlieb, the sound; Jon Stolzberg of
Intelewall, the multimedia design; and Merry Conway, the
physical dramaturgy. Dramaturges: Elizabeth Alexander, Oskar
Eustis, Dorinne Kondo, and Hector Tobar. Corey Beth Madder
was associate producer; Ed De Shae, production stage
My Enemy
Rudy Salas, Sr. Sculptor and painter

(A large very warm man, with a blue shirt with the tails out and blue jeans and tennis shoes. He is at a dining-room table with a white tablecloth. There is a bank of photographs in frames on the sideboard next to the table. There is a vase of flowers on another table near the table. There are paintings of his on the wall. Nearest the table is a painting of his wife. His wife, Margaret, a woman in glasses and a long flowered dress, moves around the room. For a while she takes photo albums out of the sideboard and out of the back room, occasionally saying something. She is listening to the entire interview. He has a hearing aid in his left ear and in his right ear. He is sitting in a wooden captain's chair, medium-sized. He moves a lot in the chair, sometimes with his feet behind the front legs, and his arms hanging over the back of the chair. He is very warm.)

An then my
my grandfather,
N. Carnación,
ub,
was a
gringo hater
'cause he had run-ins with gringos
when he was riding.
He had been a rebel,
so see there was another twist—he
had rode with Villa and those people and he remembers when he
fought the gringos when they went into Chihuahua
Pershing went in there to chase Villa and all that?
So I grew up with all this rich stuff at home.
(Three quick hits on the table and a double sweep)
and then at school,
first grade, they started telling me
I was inferior.
because I was a Mexican,
and that's where
(He hits the table several times, taps, twenty-three taps until
line “the enemy” and then on “nice white teachers” his hand
sweeps the table)
I realized I had an enemy
and that enemy was those nice white teachers.
I wonder what is it,
why
did I have this madness
that I understood this?
It's not an enemy I hated.
It's not a hate thing,
the insanity that I carried with me started when I took the
beating
from the police.
Okay, that's where the insanity came in.
In forty-
two,
when I was in my teens
running around as a zoot-suiters,
one night the cop really tore me up bad.
I turned around I threw a punch at one of 'em.
I didn't hit him hard,

but that sealed my doom.
They took me to a room
and they locked the door behind me
and there was four guys, four cops there
kicking me in the head.
As a result of the kicks in the head they fractured my
eardrum,
and, uh,
I couldn't hear
on both ears.
I was deaf,
worse than I am now.
(He pulls out one of his hearing aids)
So
from that day on
I, I had a hate in me,
even now.
I don't like to hate, never do,
the way that my Uncle Abraham told me that to hate is to
waste
energy and you mess with man upstairs,
but I had an insane hatred
for white policemen.
I used to read the paper—it's awful, it's awful—
if I would read about a cop shot down in the street,
killed,
dead,
a human being!
a fellow human being?
I say,
“So, you know, you know, so what,
maybe he’s one of those motherfuckers that,
y’know . . .
and I still get things like that.
I know this society.
I’m hooked on the news at six and the newspapers
and every morning I read injustices
and poor Margaret has to put up with me
’cause I rave and I rant and I walk around here.
I gotta eat breakfast over there,
I can’t eat breakfast with her
’cause I tell her,
“These goddamned peckerwoods,”
so she puts me out there.
But I don’t hate rednecks and peckerwoods,
and when I moved in here
it’s all peckerwoods.
I had to put out my big Mexican flag out of my van.
Oh heck,
I told my kids a long time ago, fears that I had—not physically inferior,
I grew up with the idea that whites are physically . . .
I still got that—see, that’s a prejudice,
that whites are physically afraid of, of minorities,
people of color, Blacks and Mexicans.
It’s a physical thing,
it’s a mental, mental thing that they’re physically afraid.
I, I can still see it,
I can still see it,

and, and,
and, uh-uh,
I love to see it.
It’s just how I am.
I can’t help myself when I see the right person
do the right thing,
if I see the right white guy
or the right Mexican walk down the mall
(He makes a face and laughs)
and the whites,
you know, they go into their thing already.
I don’t like to see a gang of cholos walking around,
you know, threatening people with their ugly faces—that’s something else.
Well, they put on the mask—you ever notice that?—it’s sort of a mask,
it’s, uh . . .
(He stands up and mimics them)
You know how they stand in your face with the ugly faces.
Damn, man,
I’d like to kill their dads.
That’s what I always think about.
I always dream of that—break into their houses and drag their dads out.
Well, you see, that relieves me.
But, you see, I still have that prejudice against whites.
I'm not a racist!
But I have white friends, though,
but I don't even see them as whites!
I don't even see them as whites! And my boys,
I had a lot of anxiety, I told
them, "Cooperate, man,
something happens,
your hands . . .
(Puts his hands up)
let them call you what they want,
be sure tell me who they are."
But they never told me.
Stephen was in Stanford!
Came home one weekend
to sing
with the band.
One night
cop pulled a gun at his head.
It drove me crazy—
it's still going on,
it's still going on.
How you think
a
father feels,
stuff that happened to me
fifty years
ago
happened to my son?
Man!
They didn't tell me right away,
because it would make me sick,

it would make me sick,
and, uh,
my oldest son, Rudy.
Didn't they,
Margaret,
insult him one time and they pulled you over . . .
the Alhambra cops, they pulled you over
and, aww, man . . .
My enemy.
When I Finally Got
My Vision/Nightclothes
Michael Zinzun  Representative,
Coalition Against Police Abuse

(In his office at Coalition Against Police Abuse. There are very bloody and disturbing photographs of victims of police abuse. The most disturbing one was a man with part of his skull blown off and part of his body in the chest area blown off, so that you can see the organs. There is a large white banner with a black circle and a panther. The black panther is the image from the Black Panther Party. Above the circle is "All Power to the People." At the bottom is "Support Our Youth, Support the Truce.")

I witnessed police abuse:
It was
about one o'clock in the morning
and, um,
I was asleep,
like
so many of the other neighbors,
and I hear this guy calling out for help.
So myself and other people came out in socks
and gowns
and, you know,
nightclothes
and we came out so quickly we saw the police had this
brother
handcuffed
and they was beatin' the shit out of him!

You see,
Eugene Rivers was his name
and, uh,
we had our community center here
and they was doin' it right across the street from it.
So I went out there 'long with other people and we demanded they stop.
They tried to hide him by draggin' him away and we followed him
and told him they gonna stop.
They singled me out.
They began Macing the crowd, sayin' it was hostile.
They began
shootin' the Mace to get everybody back.
They singled me out.
I was handcuffed.
Um,
when I got Maced I moved back
but as I was goin' back I didn't go back to the center,
I ended up goin' around this . . .
it was a darkened
unlit area.
And when I finally got my vision
I said I ain't goin' this way with them police behind me,
so I turned back around, and when I did,
they Maced me again
and I went down on one knee
and all I could do was feel all these police stompin' on my back.
(He is smiling)
And I was thinkin' . . . I said
why, sure am glad they got them soft walkin' shoes on, because when the patrolmen, you know, they have them cushions, so every stomp, it wasn't a direct hard old . . . yeah
  type thing.
  So then they handcuffed me.
I said they . . .
well, I can take this, we'll deal with this tamarr [sic], and they handcuffed me.
And then one of them lifted my head up—
  I was on my stomach—
  he lifted me from behind
and hit me with a billy club
  and struck me in the side of the head,
which give me about forty stitches—
the straight billy club, it wasn't a
P-28, the one with the side handle.
Now, I thought in my mind, said hunh, they couldn't even knock me out, they in trouble now.
You see what I'm sayin'?
'Cause I knew what we were gonna do, 'cause I dealt with police abuse
and I knew how to organize.
I say they couldn't even knock me out, and so as I was layin' there they was all standin' around me.
They still was Macing, the crowd was gettin' larger and larger and larger
and more police was comin'.
One these pigs stepped outta the crowd with his flashlight, caught me right in my eye, and you can still see the stitches (He lowers his lid and shows it) and
exploded the optic nerve to the brain, ya see, and boom (He snaps his fingers) that was it.
I couldn't see no more since then.
I mean, they . . . they took me to the hospital and the doctor said, "Well, we can sew this eyelid up and these stitches here but
I don't think we can do nothin' for that eye."
So when I got out I got a CAT scan, you know, and
they said, "It's gone."
So I still didn't understand it but I said
They
Jason Sanford Actor
(A rainstorm in February 1993. Saturday afternoon. We are in an office at the Mark Taper Forum. Lamplight. A handsome white man in his late twenties wearing blue jeans and a plaid shirt and Timberland boots. He played tennis in competition for years and looks like a tennis player.)

Who's they?
That's interesting, 'cause the they is a combination of a lot of things. Being brought up in Santa Barbara, it's a little bit different saying "they" than being brought up in, um, LA.
I think, 'cause being brought up in Santa Barbara you don't see a lot of blacks. You see Mexicans, you see some Chinese, but you don't see blacks. There was maybe two black people in my school. I don't know, you don't say black or you don't say Negro or,
But I mean . . .

For all the talk about the civil rights movement, I mean, we need it
today like we need sunshine
and, and, and, and fresh air, because
the price of it is the self-destruction
of a generation of kids who are
so hip and so smart
but who in some way,
so susceptible to despair across, you know, across the board.
And the other thing that nobody's talking about
in the city is the gang truce has been something of a miracle, you know.
It's the sign of a generation

that won't commit suicide.
It's
it's a reestablishment of contact with . . .
with traditions, you know,
you know of
you know of pride and struggle.
But at the same time, on the East Side we have the worst
Latinos gang
war in history.
One weekend, we have seventeen, um, Latino kids killed in
gang-related stuff.
New immigrants' kids, who couple of years ago wouldn't be
in gangs
at all, are now joining in in large numbers.
And nobody's kind of gettin' up and sayin', "Look, this is an emergency.
Let's put the resources out to at least reestablish contact with,
with, with the kids."
The fear in this city of talking to gang members,
talking to kids.
In the last instance, if you peel away words like, you know, "gang-banger" and "looter" and stuff,
this is a city at war with
its own children,
and it refuses to talk to those children,
And the city doesn't want to face these kids,
or talk to its kids,
And I think,
I think it's the same thing probably with the white
middle class,
but I guess for me to sound like a bit of a sop,
for I've come to realize what we've lost.
'Cause everything I've come to like about Southern
California growing
up here as, as, as a kid.
It's when I joined the civil rights movement in the early
sixties.
I mean, the vision was like,
yeah, I mean what the civil rights movement was about . . .
is that black kids can be surfers too.
I mean, there were a core of freedoms
and opportunities and pleasures that have been established,
again like, you know,
working-class white kids in my generation.
My parents hitchhiked out here from Ohio.
You know, I grew up with, with, with,
you know, Okies and Dust Bowl refugees
and we got free junior college education.
There were plenty—
there were more jobs than
you could imagine out there.
We could go to the beach,
we could race our cars.
I'm not saying that, you know, it was utopia or
happiness
but it was . . .
it was something incredibly important.
And the whole ethos of the civil rights struggle and
movement for
equality in California's history

was to make this available to everyone.
The irony now is that even white privileged kids
are losing these things.
I mean, there is no freedom of movement or right of
assembly for
youth.
I mean,
the only permitted legal activity anymore
is, is being in a mall shopping.
I mean, cruising has been
totally eliminated because it's . . .
it leads to gang warfare or some other crazy notion.
The beaches are patrolled by helicopters
and, and police dune buggies.
It's illegal to sleep on the, the beach anymore.
So the very things that are defined, you know, our kind of
populace,
Southern California, kind of working-class Southern
California,
have been destroyed.
People go to the desert to live in armed compounds
and to tear up the Joshua trees
instead of to, you know, to find
the freedom that you used to be able to find
in, in, you know,
the desert.
National Guard
Julio Menjivar  Lumber salesman and driver

(Near South Central, beautiful birds, traffic, hammering. In a kind of patio outside the backyard. A covered patio. Saturday morning. Very sunny. We sit on a bench. His BMW in the background. A man from El Salvador, in his late twenties. Later his mother and grandmother come to be photographed with him.)

And then,
a police passed by
and said,
that’s fine,
that’s fine
that you’re doing that.
Anyway,
it’s your neighborhood.
They were just like laughing or I don’t know—LAPD.
Black and white.
They just passed by and said it in the radio:
Go for it.
Go for it,
it’s your neighborhood.
I was only standing there
watching what was happening.

And then suddenly
jeeps came from everywhere,
from all directions,
to the intersection.
Trucks and
the National Guard.
And they threw all of the people on the ground.
They threw everybody down
and I was in the middle of a group.
They lifted me by my arm like this.
First he told me to get up.
He said ugly things to me.
And as you see,
I’m a little fat,
so I couldn’t get up.
They called me stupid.
He said, said,
many ugly things.
He said,
“Get up motherfucker, get up. Get up!”
Then he kicked me in the back.
He said,
“Come on, fat fucker,
get up."
Then I heard my wife
and my father
calling my name,
"Julio, Julio, Julio."
And then
my mother
and my sister and my wife,
they tried to go to the corner
and my mother
They almost shoot
them, almost shot them.
They were
pissed off,
too angry.
The National Guard.
They almost shot
my mom,
my wife,
and my sister
for try .
They will ask everybody questions
and the other guys don’t know how to speak English.
Then the police don’t like that.
So slap ’em in the face—
that guy got slapped three times.
An RTD bus came
and parked here
in the street,
and they put all of
us on it.

They took us to a station,
Southwest.
Young people
that got arrested.
Uh,
there was this guy crying and this other guy crying
because too tight,
too tight
the handcuffs.
And I felt very bad,
very bad.
Never never
in my life have I
been arrested.
Never
in my life.
Not in El Salvador.
This is the first time
I been in jail.
I was real scared,
yeah, yeah.
’Cause you got all these criminals
over there.
I’m not a criminal.
It’s a lot of crazy people out there,
too many.
So I sit down.
So I barely close my eyes
and they went back—
pow pow pow pow pow
come on come on get up get up
come on get up,
and they had us
on our knees
for two hours.
I was praying,
yeah,
I was praying, yeah.
Yeah, that's true
I was praying.
I was thinking of all the
bad that could happen.
Yeah.
Now I have a record.
Aha, and a two-hundred-fifty-dollar
fine
and probation for
three years.

That's Another Story
Katie Miller Bookkeeper and accountant
(South Central, September 1992. A very large
woman sitting in an armchair. She has a baseball
cap on her head. She speaks rapidly with great
force and volume.)

I think this thing
about the Koreans and the Blacks . . .
that wasn't altogether true,
and I think that the Korean stores
that got burned in the Black neighborhood that were
Korean-owned,
it was due to lack of
gettin' to know
the people that come to your store—
that's what it is.
Now,
they talk about the looting
in Koreatown . . . those wasn't blacks,
those wasn't blacks, those was Mexicans
in Koreatown.
We wasn't over there lootin' over there,
lootin' over there,
but here,
in this right here.
The stores that got looted for this one reason
only is that . . . know who you goin' know,
just know people comin' to your store, that's all,
And, um, so . . . he keeps them from five to ten years, you know.
Depending on whether you can get a good value for 'em.
It's a business
as well as a hobby.
And so I don't specifically know what car he came out in.
But one of 'em.
And those are his pride
and joys.
They are perfect.
They are polished.
They are run perfect.
They are perfect.
All I can think of is a bottle gettin' anywhere near it.

The Unheard
Maxine Waters Congresswoman.
35th District

(This interview is from a speech that she gave at the First African Methodist Episcopal Church, just after Daryl Gates had resigned and soon after the upheaval. FAME is a center for political activity in L.A. Many movie stars go there. On any Sunday you are sure to see Arsenio Hall and others. Barbra Streisand contributed money to the church after the unrest. It is a very colorful church, with an enormous mural and a huge choir with very exciting music. People line up to go in to the services the way they line up for the theater or a concert.
(Maxine Waters is a very elegant, confident congresswoman, with a big smile, a fierce bite, and a lot of guts. Her area is in South-Central. She is a brilliant orator. Her speech is punctuated by organ music and applause. Sometimes the audience goes absolutely wild.)

First
African
Methodist Episcopal Church.
You all here got it going on.
I didn't know this is what you did at twelve o'clock on Sunday.
Methodist,
Baptist,
Church of God and Christ all rolled into one.
There was an insurrection in this city before and if I remember correctly it was sparked by police brutality.
We had a Kerner Commission report.  
It talked about what was wrong with our society.  
It talked about institutionalized racism.  
It talked about a lack of services,  
lack of government responsive to the people.  
Today, as we stand here in 1992,  
if you go back and read the report  
it seems as though we are talking about what that report  
cited  
some twenty years ago still exists today.  
Mr. President,  
THEY'RE HUNGRY IN THE BRONX TONIGHT,  
THEY'RE HUNGRY IN ATLANTA TONIGHT,  
THEY'RE HUNGRY IN ST. LOUIS TONIGHT.  
Mr. President,  
our children's lives are at stake.  
We want to deal with the young men who have been  
dropped off of  
America's agenda.  
Just hangin' out,  
chillin',  
nothin' to do,  
nowhere to go.  
They don't show up on anybody's statistics.  
They're not in school,  
they have never been employed,  
they don't really live anywhere.  
They move from grandmama  
to mama to girlfriend.  
They're on general relief and  
they're sleepin' under bridges.  

Mr. President,  
Mr. Governor,  
and anybody else who wants to listen:  
Everybody in the street was not a thug  
or a hood.  
For politicians who think  
everybody in the street  
who committed a petty crime,  
stealing some Pampers  
for the baby,  
a new pair of shoes . . .  
We know you're not supposed to steal,  
but the times are such,  
the environment is such,  
that good people reacted in strange ways. They are not all  
crooks and  
criminals.  
If they are,  
Mr. President,  
what about your violations?  
Oh yes.  
We're angry,  
and yes,  
this Rodney King incident.  
The verdict.  
Oh, it was more than a slap in the face.  
It kind of reached in and grabbed you right here in the  
heart  
and it pulled at you  
and it hurts so bad.  
They want me to march out into Watts,
as the black so-called leadership did in the sixties, 
and say, “Cool it, baby, 
cool it.”
I am sorry.
I know how to talk to my people.
I know how to tell them not to put their lives at risk.
I know how to say don’t put other people’s lives at risk.
But, journalists,
don’t you dare dictate to me 
about what I’m supposed to say.
It’s not nice to display anger.
I am angry.
It is all right to be angry.
It is unfortunate what people do when they are frustrated
 and angry.
The fact of the matter is, 
whether we like it or not,
riot
is the voice of the unheard.

Oh, Washington
is, um,
a place where
ritual and custom
does not allow them
to,
 uh,
talk about things that
don’t fit nicely into
the formula.
I mean, our leadership
is so far removed
from what really goes on in the world
they, um,
it’s not enough to say they’re insensitive
or they don’t care.
They really
don’t
know.
I mean, they really don’t see it,
they really don’t understand it,
they really don’t see their lives in
Swallowing the Bitterness
Mrs. Young-Soon Han  Former liquor store owner

(A house on Sycamore Street in Los Angeles just south of Beverly. A tree-lined street. A quiet street. It’s in an area where many Hasidic Jews live as well as yuppie types. Mrs. Young-Soon Han’s living room is impeccable. Dark pink-and-apricot rug and sofa and chairs. The sofa and chairs are made of a velour. On the back of the sofa and chairs is a Korean design. A kind of circle with lines in it, a geometric design. There is a glass coffee table in front of the sofa. There is nothing on the coffee table. There is a mantel with a bookcase, and a lot of books. The mantel has about thirty trophies. These are her nephew’s. They may be for soccer. On the wall behind the sofa area, a series of citations and awards. These are her ex-husband’s. They are civic awards. There are a couple of pictures of her husband shaking hands with official-looking people and accepting awards. In this area is also a large painting of Jesus Christ. There is another religious painting over the archway to the dining room. There are some objects hanging on the side of the archway. Long strips and oval shapes. It is very quiet. When we first came in, the television was on, but she turned it off.

(She is sitting on the floor and leaning on the coffee table. When she hits her hand on the table, it sounds very much like a drum. I am accompanied by two Korean-American graduate students from UCLA.)

I still believe it.
I don’t deny that now because I’m a victim, but as the year ends in ’92 and we were still in turmoil and having all the financial problems and mental problems. Then a couple months ago I really realized that Korean immigrants were left out from this society and we were nothing.
What is our right?
Is it because we are Korean?
Is it because we have no politicians?
Is it because we don’t speak good English?
Why?
Why do we have to be left out?
(She is hitting her hand on the coffee table)
We are not qualified to have medical treatment.
We are not qualified to get, uh, food stamp
(She hits the table once),
not GR
(Hits the table once),
no welfare
(Hits the table once).
Anything.

Until last year
I believed America is the best.

244 Anna Deavere Smith
Many Afro-Americans
(Two quick hits)
who never worked
(One hit),
they get
at least minimum amount
(One hit)
of money
(One hit)
to survive
(One hit).
We don’t get any!
(large hit with full hand spread)
Because we have a car
(One hit)
and we have a house.
(Pause six seconds)
And we are high taxpayers.
(One hit)
(Pause fourteen seconds)
Where do I finda [sic] justice?
Okay, Black people
probably
believe they won
by the trial?
Even some complains only half right?
justice was there.
But I watched the television
that Sunday morning,
early morning as they started.
I started watch it all day.

They were having party and then they celebrated,
all of South-Central,
all the churches.
They finally found that justice exists
in this society.
Then where is the victims’ rights?
They got their rights.
By destroying innocent Korean merchants . . .
They have a lot of respect,
as I do,
for
Dr. Martin King?
He is the only model for Black community.
I don’t care Jesse Jackson.
But
he was the model
of nonviolence.
Nonviolence?
They like to have hisheh [sic] spirits.
What about last year?
They destroyed innocent people.
(Five-second pause)
And I wonder if that is really justice
(And a very soft "uh" after "justice," like "justicah," but very quick)
to get their rights
in this way.
(Thirteen-second pause)
I wash swallowing the bitternesseh,
sitting here alone
and watching them.
They became all hilarious
(Three-second pause)
and, uh,
in a way I was happy for them
and I felt glad for them.
At leasth they got something back, you know.
Just let's forget Korean victims or other victims
who are destroyed by them.
They have fought
for their rights
(One hit simultaneous with the word "rights")
over two centuries
(One hit simultaneous with "centuries")
and I have a lot of sympathy and understanding for them.
Because of their effort and sacrificing,
other minorities, like Hispanic
or Asians,
maybe we have to suffer more
by mainstream.
You know,
that's why I understand,
and then
I like to be part of their
'joyment.
But . . .
That's why I had mixed feeling
as soon as I heard the verdict.

I wish I could
live together
with eh [sic] Blacks,
but after the riots
there were too much differences.
The fire is still there—
how do you call it?—
igni . . .
igniting fire.
(She says a Korean phrase phonetically: "Dashi yun gt ga
nuh")
It's still dere.
It canuh
burst out anytime.