

In 1992, four Los Angeles police officers were acquitted in a trial of the beating of Rodney King. For six days, riots spread throughout the metropolitan area of Los Angeles, from Lake View Terrace neighborhood near the highway of where Rodney King was beaten, to the infamous street intersection of Normandie and Florence where media outlets broadcasted the beating of Reginald Denny. It was a national tragedy that ended up destroying homes, stores, and 63 lives.

Although demographics in the early 1990's show the city's population was more than 50% white, media coverage back then revealed that neighborhoods of ethnic minorities were greatly affected by the looting, including Latino and Korean communities. The initial racial conflict in LA evolved into a national issue that continues to pit America's communities of color against each other.

Language and cultural barriers had caused misconception and miscommunication between these communities as they arduously search for someone to blame. We may now witness these seeds of anti-blackness and anti-immigration being embedded into minority communities and growing into impassable walls that would only benefit the oppressive hierarchy of race and class in America. Aristotle once described the cleansing of emotions through experiencing art as "catharsis." We feel pity for characters affected by the LA Riots and fear the future of such a racial divide becoming a frequent occurrence in America. Enduring presentations of the violence, hurting, healing, and anger from thirty-seven distinct voices, we are meant to reflect and renew ourselves in understanding the tragedy from within our own emotional responses. It is an overwhelming task for us, as storytellers and audience members, to listen to and witness the voices of the strong, the weak, and the estranged within this world Anna Deavere Smith documented in 1992.

Like its real-life tragedy, the play does not come to a solid conclusion. Uncertainty still lingers after a diverse set of voices has come forward with their case of frustration, resentment, and cynicism. A city born from the diversity of people has divided itself further apart. When asked about the initial criticism of *Twilight*, Smith stated "...my work, at least at this moment, isn't about unifying. A unifying idea is not enough...My work is about giving voice to the unheard...in such a way that you question, or re-examine, what is the truth. And we have to be able to tolerate more than one voice." The heart of the story may lie within this play's journalistic structure of performing verbatim the words of many through one solo performer, a woman of color. The raw and minimalistic approach of documentary theatre emphasizes the need to listen to and absorb the language and emotions of the characters without the judgement of what their skin color may look like. And by walking in these people's shoes, there is a chance to reflect on and renew our feelings and knowledge of racial identity in America.

---Elizabeth Ung, Associate Dramaturg