Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ANNA DEAVERE SMITH

Born in 1950 in Baltimore, Maryland, Anna Deavere Smith is a playwright, actress, and professor. Smith studied acting at Beaver College (now Arcadia University) and later received an M.F.A. in acting from the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, California. She acted in stage productions at the beginning of her career, later appearing in numerous films and television series, including *The West Wing*, *Nurse Jackie*, *For the People*, and *Philadelphia*. Smith is known for her work as an actress and writer in the genre of documentary/verbatim theatre, which uses pre-existing materials such as newspapers, interviews, and journals as source material for the play's content. Her most famous works in this genre include *Fires in the Mirror* (1993) and *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* (1994). Both of these plays belong to her *On the Road* series of one-woman plays, which draw exclusively from interviews Smith conducts with people living in communities in crisis. Smith boasts numerous awards and accolades, including a nomination for the 1993 Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *Fires in the Mirror* and Tony Award nominations for Best Actress and Best Play for her work in *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*. In addition, she was a recipient of the 1996 MacArthur Fellowship, as well as the 2012 National Humanities Medal, awarded by President Barack Obama. She has also won two Obie awards. Currently, Smith is a professor in the department of Art & Public Policy at New York University, and she serves as director for the Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue. In 2019, she was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The impetus for the 1992 Los Angeles riots was the acquittal of all four LAPD officers charged with using excessive force in their beating of Rodney King at a traffic stop in March of 1991. However, the tensions between the LAPD and Los Angeles's minority communities had brewed for years before the 1992 riots. Daryl Gates, chief of the LAPD from 1973 to 1992, is frequently condemned for guiding the police force into an era defined by rampant police brutality, harassment, and racial profiling. One major implementation for which Gates was responsible was Operation Hammer, an operative that began in 1987 and was modeled after gang sweeps conducted throughout the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles. Operation Hammer was intended to minimize gang violence, which had become a severe problem in the 1980s with the introduction of crack cocaine into the drug trade. With Operation Hammer, mass arrests became a common occurrence. At the height of Operation Hammer in April 1988, the LAPD arrested 1,453 people over the course of a single weekend. Police brutality increased by around 33 percent over the second half of the 1980s. The LAPD was also accused of utilizing racial profiling in their mass arrests, intentionally and disproportionately targeting Black and Latino youths. By 1990, Operation Hammer had led to the arrest of over 50,000 people, and the LAPD arrested more Black men and women than they had since the Watts riots in 1965. In addition, racial tensions between South-Central Los Angeles's Black and Korean American communities also helped incite the riots. In 1991, a Korean shopkeeper, Soon Ja Du, shot and killed 15-year-old Latasha Harlins after wrongfully believing Harlins was attempting to steal a bottle of orange juice. Despite multiple eyewitness accounts that Du had fired the gun voluntarily, Du served no jail time for her crime.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992 is a work of documentary theatre, a genre that derives its source material from existing materials such as newspapers, journals, and interviews. In verbatim theater, a subgenre of documentary theatre, these materials appear in unaltered forms and are comprised exclusively of the actual words of real people as collected by the playwright via interview and then assembled to construct the play. Smith is best known for her documentary/verbatim theatre work as an actress and playwright. In addition to *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, she wrote *Fires in the Mirror* (1992), a work of documentary theater about the Crown Heights riot in Brooklyn, New York. Like *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, *Fires in the Mirror* is written for solo performers and consists of monologues taken from interviews Smith conducted with people impacted by riots in Crown Heights. Other notable works of verbatim theatre include *The Laramie Project* (2000) by Moises Kaufman, which is about the murder of Matthew Shepard in Laramie, Wyoming, in 1998. Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen's *The Exonerated* (2002) comprises interviews with people who have been exonerated from death row. Lastly, the main subject of Smith's play is the 1991 beating of Rodney King by four LAPD officers and the resulting riots that took place in response to the initial not guilty verdict the four officers involved received. Another work about King's assault is *Rodney King* (2014), a one-person play by Roger Guenveur Smith. On a broader level, the play explores the relationship between systemic racism and police brutality. *Pass Over* (2017) by American playwright Antoinette Chinonye Nwandu is a politically conscious riff on Samuel Beckett's famous absurdist play, *Waiting for Godot*, and explores police violence against Black people.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Twilight—Los Angeles, 1992: on the road: A Search for American Character*
- **When Written:** 1992–1993
- **Where Written:** United States
- **When Published:** 1994
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** One-Person Play, Documentary Theater, Verbatim Theater
- **Setting:** Los Angeles, California
- **Antagonist:** Systemic Racism
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Reaching a Wider Audience. Smith performed a filmed production of *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* entitled *Twilight: Los Angeles*, directed by Marc Levin. The production aired on PBS and in limited theaters in 2000.

Then and Now. April 2022 marked the 30th anniversary of the Los Angeles riots, while 2021 marked the 30th anniversary of the beating of Rodney King. While it was an anomaly for a civilian to capture police violence on camera in the 1990s, today, it is not uncommon due to the prevalence of cell phones. In an *NPR* article published to commemorate the riots' anniversary, King's daughter, Lora King, has stated "the only difference between back then and now is hashtags."

PLOT SUMMARY

Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992 is a work of documentary theatre comprised of monologues derived from interviews that the playwright, Anna Deavere Smith, conducted with citizens of Los Angeles whose lives were impacted by the 1992 Los Angeles riots. The riots began in response to Rodney King's first trial, which concluded with the jury moving to acquit all four white LAPD officers accused of using excessive force when they arrested and beat him in March 1991. *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* is a one-person play, first performed by Smith herself, in which she assumes the personas of her interview subjects to present divergent viewpoints that illuminate the state of racial tension, systemic oppression, justice, and injustice in Los Angeles in the 1990s.

The Prologue consists of one interview delivered by Rudy Salas, Sr., a Mexican American sculptor and painter based in Los Angeles. Salas speaks about how his personal experiences with racism and police brutality growing up as a Latino man in Los Angeles taught him to view white people as his "enemy." Salas's monologue establishes systemic racism, police brutality, and an "us versus them" dichotomy as central problems in late 20th-century Los Angeles.

Act One: The Territory presents interviews that further develop the extent to which systemic racism and police corruption impact the experiences of Los Angeles's minority communities. These interviews also expand on the issue of the "us versus them" dichotomy. Smith's interview with Stanley K. Sheinbaum, former president of the Los Angeles Police Commission, describes how the LAPD condemned Sheinbaum's attempts to listen to the concerns raised by gang members involved in the gang truce negotiations, accusing Sheinbaum of siding with the enemy. The negative response leads Sheinbaum to question why a person "ha[s] to be on a side" in the first place. Michael Zinzun, a representative for the Coalition Against Police Abuse, speaks about his personal experience with police brutality, which cost him his eye. Mike Davis, an LA-based writer and urban critic, investigates the "us versus them" dichotomy, noting how his own experiences with law enforcement have been favorable and absent of the dehumanizing **violence** the police seem to reserve for people of color. Theresa Allison, a founder of Mothers Reclaiming Our Children (Mothers ROC) and mother of gang truce architect Dewayne Holmes, talks about the common occurrence of the LAPD apprehending young Black and Latino men on false or exaggerated charges. Cornel West, a renowned public intellectual, analyzes the role that race, class, and gender play in Los Angeles's current state of crisis.

Act Two: Here's a Nobody shifts the play's focus to Rodney King's attack. It opens with the voice of Angela King, Rodney King's aunt, who shares personal anecdotes of Rodney as a young boy and speaks about the impact his beating has had on their family. She criticizes the media's attempts to turn the public against her nephew by portraying him in a negative way that is not representative of his true character. Act Two's title comes from Angela's observation that her nephew's attackers felt justified in beating him so violently because he was just "a nobody," and they had assumed their actions would have no repercussions.

In another interview, Sergeant Charles Duke, a member of the LAPD's Special Weapons and Tactics Unit and the LAPD's use-of-force expert, suggests that Powell only beat King with a baton so many times because he had a weak, ineffective grasp on the instrument. He also explains how the police force increased their use of batons after the Police Commission banned upper-body-control holds; this was due to a report of increased deaths in Black people whom officers subdued with this type of hold. He suspects that Daryl Gates, who was police chief at the time, ordered officers to engage in more incidents like King's to get back at the Police Commission for banning upper-body-control holds.

Act Two also presents interviews with Josie Morales, a witness to King's beating who was not called to testify in court; an

anonymous male juror, who describes the threats and harassment he and the other jurors received after delivering their verdict of acquittal on all counts; and Gil Garcetti, district attorney of Los Angeles, who explains how people's willingness to trust that the police are there to protect them makes police excellent court witnesses.

In Act Three: War Zone, Smith presents a series of interviews told from the perspective of the riots' participants and victims. Korean American shopkeepers, such as Chung Lee and Richard Kim, describe how their stores were looted and destroyed during the riots. Black characters like Allen Cooper, Katie Miller, and Paul Parker view the riots as the Black community's justified response to the racism and police brutality that Black people experience on a daily basis. Congresswoman Maxine Waters states that "riot / is the voice of the unheard." In contrast, the riots inspire fear and outrage in many of the play's white, privileged characters. Judith Tur is a news reporter who shows Smith her video recording of the beating of Reginald Denny who was targeted and attacked by four Black men for being white. Tur makes bigoted remarks about the Black rioters and refuses to sympathize with their frustrations. Elaine Young, a real estate agent for rich celebrities, finds herself in hot water after a man accuses her of making flippant remarks about the riot. An anonymous female college student recalls being scared for her life before launching into a longwinded tangent about how broken up her father would be if he drove one of his vintage cars into the city and one of the protestors threw a broken bottle at it. Finally, Daryl Gates complains about his reputation as "the symbol / of police oppression / in the United States" while trying to defend his failure to be on post at the time the Simi Valley trial verdicts were announced.

One significant sequence of interviews in Act Three concerns the attack of Reginald Denny, a white trucker whom four Black men (nicknamed the LA 4) racially targeted and attacked, leading Denny to suffer life-altering injuries. The media seized on Denny's story, transforming him into a symbol of white victimhood. Denny's story nearly overshadowed King's initial attack, and people use him to justify and exacerbate white, affluent America's existing fears about Black people.

Act Four: Twilight deals with the aftermath of the riots, presenting a series of interviews that address how the city of Los Angeles ought to move beyond crisis and down a path of healing and progress. Reverend Tom Choi, a minister, speaks of the togetherness he felt with the Black people he encountered when he went to South-Central Los Angeles to help clean up after the riots. The experience reminded him to open himself up to sharing love with others. Paula Weinstein, a movie producer, talks about people from different races and cultures coming together to volunteer to help neighborhoods affected by the riots. However, she ultimately decides that the phenomenon was more a symbolic gesture than an indicator of actual change. Other characters share Weinstein's cynical attitude. Otis Chandler, former editor of the Los Angeles *Times*, notes how the city failed to implement long-term changes following the Watts riots and fears the same thing will happen with the 1992 riots. Elaine Brown, former head of the Black Panther Party, laments the unlikelihood of an "unorganized, poorly armed" resistance army to overpower "the power and weaponry / and the arsenal of the United States government and its willingness to / use it."

Writer and scholar Homi Bhabha and artist Betye Saar then meditate on the idea of **twilight**, which both characters interpret as a symbol for the uncertain, ambiguous situation Los Angeles finds itself in the aftermath of the riots. However, whereas Homi Bhabha sees this uncertainty as an opportunity to start anew and imagine better, more just institutions and ways of being, Saar sees only "evil" and powerlessness.

Act Five: Justice expands on the question of how Los Angeles should move forward in the wake of the riots. The interview subjects explore the meaning of justice and grapple with the question of whether the Rodney King trials and riots brought about any form of justice and, if so, to whom. Mrs. Young-Soon Han, whose liquor store was destroyed in the riots, feels disillusioned with America. Though she wants to feel happy for the Black people for whom the riots were cathartic, she struggles to overcome the bitterness she feels due to her perception that America denies Korean American people their own justice.

The play closes with an interview with Twilight Bey, an organizer of the gang truce and the play's namesake. Twilight Bey continues to consider what twilight can stand for. He emphasizes that twilight exists in between darkness and light, comparing darkness to the self and light to the knowledge of the world and other people. Twilight Bey concludes his interview by emphasizing the necessity of bridging the gap between the self and the world in order "to be a full human being," suggesting that looking beyond one's own race to begin to understand the experiences of others will be essential as the city moves toward healing its social ills.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Rodney King – A Black man living in Los Angeles, on March 3, 1991, Rodney King was apprehended by officers of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) following a high-speed chase. Upon apprehension, he was beaten by four officers, Officer Theodore C Briseno, Sergeant Stacey C. Koon, Officer Lawrence M. Powell, and Officer Timothy E. Wind, resulting in extreme, life-altering injuries. The officers were charged with violating King's civil rights, yet at the conclusion of King's Simi Valley trial on April 29, 1992, the jury issued a not guilty verdict for all four men. The verdict generated massive outrage among

the public and incited the Los Angeles riots, which resulted in nearly 60 deaths, thousands of injuries and arrests, and the destruction of many homes and businesses. While Rodney King is very much at the center of the play, he has no monologue of his own and materializes only through the voices of others. King's aunt, Angela King, recalls her nephew as a young boy in an effort to humanize him amid an onslaught of media depictions that she believes have vilified and misrepresented him. King's presence appears, as well, through the voices of other characters whose lives were impacted by the riots, or who have had similar experiences with police brutality.

Anna Deavere Smith – Anna Deavere Smith is the author of *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, a one-person play whose premiere featured Smith in the sole role. The play is comprised of a series of monologues excerpted from interviews that Smith conducted with citizens of Los Angeles whose lives were affected by the 1992 Los Angeles riots. In this way, Smith invites the audience to revisit this significant moment in history through the eyes of people who lived through the riots. With the exception of Smith's stage directions, the play is composed entirely of the voices of Smith's interview subjects. While the play doesn't have a conventional plot, Smith's careful selection and assembly of her interview source material forms a cohesive narrative that explores the riots' themselves, the state of race relations in late 20th-century Los Angeles that allowed them to happen, and how the city might begin to heal and move forward in aftermath of crisis and social upheaval.

Twilight Bey – Twilight Bey is a former gang member and organizer of the gang truce that commenced in the aftermath of the 1992 Los Angeles riots. The play derives its title from his name, and his monologue "Limbo/Twilight #2" is *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*'s closing scene. In "Limbo/Twilight #2," Twilight Bey talks about the origins of his name, Twilight. He fashioned the name himself, combining the word "twice" (growing up, people would commend his intelligence, claiming him to be twice as smart as his years) and "light," which he sees as a symbol of knowledge and wisdom. He also meditates on **twilight** as a time that exists in limbo, "stuck between night and day," darkness and light. He expands on this metaphor, arguing that "to be a true human being," people have to bridge the gap between night and day, self and other, to understand the world around them. Twilight's closing thoughts articulate one of the play's main ideas, which is that it will take collective action if Los Angeles wants to grow and learn from the riots, as well as transcend the racial tensions and fear that continue to overrun the city, its people, and its institutions.

Theresa Allison – Theresa Allison is a founder of Mothers Reclaiming Our Children (Mothers ROC), an organization that aids Black and Latino men arrested in Los Angeles on false or exaggerated charges. Her son is Dewayne Holmes, who developed the gang truce. In her emotional interview, "Lightning But No Rain," Allison describes the death of her nephew, Tiny, who was killed by the LAPD. Tiny's death made Allison realize how desperately change needed to happen in her community and inspired her to organize in the struggle against police corruption and brutality. Allison provides a detailed account of the corrupt practices of the LAPD, as well as their inhumane treatment of young Black men. One particularly striking detail from her account is the LAPD's practice of driving young Black men from the projects to neighborhoods controlled by rival gangs, dropping them off, and leaving them to be killed in enemy territory. Allison describes police officers beating Black youths as young as 12 and details how the LAPD targeted her son Dewayne, eventually arresting him on false charges. Like many other oppressed characters Smith interviews for her play, Allison wonders why she and other mothers in her position aren't worthy of justice and equal treatment in the eyes of the law.

Angela King – Angela King is the aunt of Rodney King. Although the play centers around King's beating and the resultant riots, the play doesn't feature his voice or include his firsthand account of the beating. Much of what the reader gleans of King comes from Angela King's highly personal, poignant monologue about Rodney as a young person and the trauma he and his loved ones experienced in the aftermath of his beating. Angela King paints a humanizing, personal account of King as a vivacious, special person. She remembers fishing in the Sacramento River with a teenage Rodney and watching him catch fish with his bare hands, like some "wild African[]." Angela believes her sympathetic depiction of Rodney was largely absent from the mainstream media, which sought to slander him and discredit his character. Angela is determined to secure justice for her nephew and show the public the truth of his story. She painfully recollects how it took multiple procedures for Rodney to look like himself again after he suffered extensive injuries from his beating. She cries as she speaks of Rodney and has trouble understanding why he and their family have been met with such injustice, hardship, and cruelty. Angela thinks the media depiction of her nephew would've been different if he weren't a "nobody." This speaks to the play's theme of how powerful institutions, such as law enforcement, fail to protect their community's most vulnerable populations, often inflicting harm upon them instead.

Reginald Denny – Reginald Denny is a white truck driver who was racially targeted and attacked by Black protestors during the riots. He was ultimately rescued and rushed to the hospital by four Black people who saw the attack broadcast on television and rushed to his aid. Denny suffered severe injuries as a result of the attack, and he required years to recover. Unlike Judith Tur, who has no sympathy for protestors, Denny doesn't harbor resentment against the Black community. Instead, his attack inspires him to see the "weird common thread" that connects his life and the lives of his rescuers. In his interview with Smith, Denny expresses his wish to buy a house

and set aside one of its rooms as a memorial to the riots and to all the kind notes he received from strangers after his attack. As with Rodney King's beating, Denny's attack was captured on video, broadcast to the world, and created widespread public outcry. Tur's account, in particular, shows how white viewers used Denny's attack to validate their fears about the Black community and paint themselves as victims. Throughout the play, Smith challenges the narrative of white victimhood, most prevalently through interviews with Black characters, such as Paul Parker and Al Cooper, who suggest that Denny's attack was only a significant because it was an outlier: a white person being beaten is an anomaly and worthy of public unrest, whereas a Black person being beaten is culturally accepted as something that just happens. Denny's interview illustrates his capacity for forgiveness and his desire to embrace a shared experience with people of other races.

Maxine Waters –Maxine Waters is a U.S. Congresswoman from California. Waters's first appearance is in "The Unheard," a scene that uses text from a speech Waters delivered at the First African Methodist Episcopal Church shortly after Daryl Gates resigned following the public's outcry at the not guilty verdicts the jury delivered at Rodney King's Simi Valley trial. In this speech, Waters affirmatively states that it was police brutality that caused the riots. She laments the government's willingness to implement policy aimed at addressing decades of state-sanctioned, institutionalized racism, citing the lack of official response following the Kerner Commission report as a historical example of government inaction. Waters is adamant that race relations in America have remained largely unimproved since the civil rights movement in the 1960s. She accuses politicians of being ignorant of the plight of marginalized communities and choosing to believe that minorities who commit "petty crime[s]" out of desperation are hardened, violent criminals. She sees a double standard applied to the public's condemnation of impoverished Black communities, suggesting that the government excuses bad behavior in its elected officials while condemning Black people for far lesser offenses. Waters ends her speech by justifying the **violence** of the riots, stating that "riot / is the voice of the unheard."

Paul Parker – Paul Parker is a chairperson for Free the LA Four Plus Defense Committee. His brother Lance was targeted by the police for being involved with Reginald Denny's attack. Parker criticizes law enforcement's attack on his brother, as well as the public outcry against Denny's attack, arguing that the only time people care about crime is when white people are victims. As such, he has little sympathy for Denny and suggests that attacks like Denny's are justified due to the years of trauma and **violence** America's Black population has suffered at the hands of a corrupt, racist justice system. Parker also addresses criticism that Black protestors "burned down their own neighborhoods," explaining that most businesses that protestors targeted belonged to Korean shop owners. Parker employs racist logic to justify this choice, arguing that "the Koreans was like the Jews in the day / and we put them in check." Parker's failure to recognize the Korean population as victims of America's systemic racism (and his derogatory insinuation about Jewish people) illustrates how systems of oppression maintain power by pitting oppressed communities against each other.

Judith Tur – Judith Tur is a ground reporter for LA News Service. Her monologue, "War Zone," introduces the Reginald Denny beating, which, like King's beating, was videorecorded and widely viewed by the American public. Tur witnesses the attack while filming it for her news station from a helicopter overhead. Tur has no sympathy for the Black people who beat Denny. Although she claims not to be racist, she refers to Denny's attackers as "animal[s]" who "don't deserve / to live," using dehumanizing language. Seeing the "war zone" of the riots makes Tur proclaim, "this is not my United States anymore." It's implied that Tur has no problem with such violence occurring in "her" United States, so long as it remains invisible to her and doesn't affect her life directly. Likewise, she has no sympathy for Black people living in poor neighborhoods, believing that "we've all had a rough time in our life," and hardship isn't an excuse not to work and to resort to violence. Tur functions as a stand-in for the white Americans for whom the riots, and Denny's attack, confirmed their prejudiced attitude toward Black people, and their belief that the Black community posed a threat to the prosperity of the city's white population.

Allen Cooper "Big Al" – Allen Cooper is an ex-gang member, ex-convict, and activist in the national truce movement. Cooper views the public uproar over Rodney King and Reginald Denny as equally distracting from the real structural problems responsible for the racial and class tensions that hurt Los Angeles's minority communities, the Black community in particular. Cooper is less sympathetic to Denny than the news reporter Judith Tur, reasoning that Denny should have known not to drive his truck into the middle of a riot if he didn't want trouble. Implicit in Cooper's lack of sympathy is a tiredness with society extending endless sympathies toward white people, while offering not even a fraction of this sympathy to Black people. Cooper implies that the reason Denny's beating has caused such a stir is that it's an exception to the rule because Denny is white, whereas violence against Black people goes largely unnoticed because it's accepted as par for the course.

Cornel West – Cornel West is a philosopher, activist, and public intellectual whose work concerns race, gender, and class in American society. In his monologue, "A Bloodstained Banner," West situates the Rodney King beating within a broader sociopolitical and economic context. He suggests that America's fixation on a problematic "machismo" ethic to protect one's own resources and land against "an enemy-other" fuels

both police brutality against Black people, as well as Black gang **violence**. He also presents Black gang violence as the Black community's attempt to "outbrutalize the police brutality." To West, both displays of machismo are problematic, oppressive, intertwined with economic incentives, and existing "within a patriarchal mode." West sees race, class, and gender as destructive social constructs that drive wedges between people and prevent them from realizing their shared consciousness as members of a collective humanity.

Elvira Evers – Elvira Evers is a Panamanian woman employed as a general worker and cashier at the Canteen Corporation. In her interview, she recalls being shot in the stomach during the riots—while pregnant. Evers's friend rushed her to the hospital, where she gave birth via cesarian-section. A doctor then surgically removed the bullet, which was lodged in her baby's elbow. Had the bullet not landed there, neither Evers nor her baby would have survived the shooting. Evers suggests that her unborn daughter "caught [the bullet] in her arms," which she frames as a lesson about the importance of "open[ing] your eyes" to one's surroundings. This reflects the play's larger theme of opening oneself to the outside world in order to forge connections with others and be a part of a collective consciousness.

Katie Miller – Katie Miller is a bookkeeper and accountant who speaks with great authority on why the riots are justified and what they mean for the Black community. In response to criticism about Korean stores being unfairly targeted and looted during the riots, Miller suggests that Korean shopkeepers should have made more of an effort to get to know the local people who patronized their stores, which were located in a predominantly Black neighborhood. She has little sympathy for victims of the riot and points to the double standard of outrage that emerged aftermath. She criticizes how Paul Moyer, a prominent news reporter who covered the riots, seemed indifferent about minority businesses being destroyed, but was outraged when a store he remembered frequenting as a young boy was targeted. Moyer's unequal outrage reaffirms how differently the broader society responds to injustices committed against its privileged communities versus injustices committed against its underprivileged communities.

Sergeant Charles Duke – Sergeant Charles Duke, Special Weapons and Tactics Unit of the LAPD, served as a defense witness in both the Simi Valley and Federal trial as the LAPD's use-of-force expert. Duke defends the LAPD officers' physical altercation with Rodney King. He interprets Officer Powell's action of repeatedly striking King with his baton as proof not of excessive use of force, but of Powell's "weak and inefficient" handling of his baton. Had Powell properly handled his weapon, Duke asserts, he could have administered fewer—but more efficient—blows to King. Duke also maintains that police wouldn't need to resort to batons in the first place if they were able to use upper-body-control holds, which the Police Commission banned in 1982 after a report associated this restraint technique with a high level of deaths, predominantly among Black people. Duke suspects that Daryl Gates encouraged officers to engage in more altercations like King's to get back at the Police Commission for its ban on upper-body-control holds. That institutional squabbles and politics take priority over the humane treatment of Black citizens speaks to the level of corruption and dysfunction within the LAPD in the 1990s, as well as the systemic racism that informed their practices.

Elaine Young – Elaine Young is a real estate agent who serves mostly movie stars. She is among the play's most privileged interview subjects. Her account of the riots, from which she took shelter in the luxurious confines of the Beverly Hills Hotel, demonstrates her racial and economic privilege. Young talks about meeting with other high society Beverly Hills residents at the Polo Lounge at the Beverly Hills Hotel during the riots, commiserating with one another late into the night during a time when the city was gripped by fears of **violence** and social collapse. When reporters later interviewed Elaine about her time at the hotel, she spoke nostalgically of her happy associations with the place, recalling trips she took there when her daughter was a young girl. After the interview was released, a man wrote Young a letter, criticizing her sentimental musings and accusing her of trivializing the riots. In her interview with Smith, Young admits to feeling awful about the criticism and insists that it wasn't her intention to make light of the riots. However, she ends her interview by describing the Beverly Hills Hotel as being "like a fortress" for her and the other people that gathered there, indirectly admitting to her expectation that society will afford places and resources to shield its privileged classes and races from violence and oppression.

Daryl Gates – Daryl Gates was chief of the LAPD during the riots, after which he was forced to resign. In his interview, he attempts to defend his absence from Los Angeles after the verdict for Rodney King's Simi Valley trail was announced—an absence that was heavily criticized and used to fuel the public support for his resignation. At the time the jury was scheduled to deliver the verdict, Gates was out of office attending a fundraising event organized by a group that opposed Proposition F, a city amendment that would impose term limits on the LAPD police chief. Critics claimed that Gates's attendance at the function proved how out of touch he was. In his interview, Gates disputes these claims, arguing that his presence wouldn't have done much good, anyway, since people already viewed him as "the symbol / of police oppression / in the United States," a designation Gates resents. Gates is angry that his legacy of over 40 years in law enforcement will now be forgotten, "Just because some officers / whacked Rodney King / out in Foothill Division / while I was in Washington, D.C."

Lance – Lance is Paul Parker's brother. In Parker's interview, he

describes how law enforcement accused Lance of having gang affiliations and shooting at Reginald Denny during the Los Angeles riots, both of which Parker rejects as untrue. Parker dedicates his life to seeking justice for his brother in his role as a chairperson for the Free the LA Four Plus Defense Committee.

Rudy Salas, Sr. – Rudy Salas, Sr. is a Mexican American sculptor and painter. The Prologue opens with Salas's interview, "My Enemy," in which he describes how the racism he experienced in elementary school, and his later encounters with police brutality, taught him to view white people as his "enemy." Salas also laments how his sons experience similar encounters with racism, suggesting that racial tensions in Los Angeles haven't changed much since Salas was a child. Salas's account introduces readers and viewers to the "us versus them" dynamic that underlies many of the characters' experiences throughout the following acts of the play.

Stanley K. Sheinbaum – Stanley K. Sheinbaum is the former president of the Los Angeles Police Commission. In his first interview, he talks about attending the gang truce meetings at Nickerson Gardens to try to understand gang members' experiences and the process of the truce. When Sheinbaum's superiors found out, they accused him of siding with the enemy. In his interview, however, Sheinbaum wonders why there have to be sides in the first place, thereby challenging the "us versus them" dichotomy that justifies and perpetuates the racial tensions and systemic racism that permeates late 20th-century Los Angeles.

Michael Zinzun – Michael Zinzun is a representative for the Coalition Against Police Abuse and an ex-Black Panther. In his interview, Zinzun describes being the victim of police brutality. His brutal attack resulted in the loss of his eye and motivated him to keep struggling and organizing in the fight against police corruption and abuse.

Jason Sanford – Jason Sanford is a white actor. His account of life in Los Angeles differs dramatically from most of the perspectives presented by people of color whom Smith interviews. Sanford enjoyed a privileged upbringing in Santa Barbara, and his experiences with law enforcement have been overwhelmingly positive. He recalls being arrested in Santa Barbara and talking about tennis with the officers who drove him away from the scene in their patrol car, demonstrating how the police do not dehumanize privileged white people like Sanford the way they dehumanize Black people.

Anonymous Young Black Man – Smith interviews an anonymous young Black man who describes his experiences as a former gang member. The man concludes his interview by identifying "Am I Dreaming" by Atlantic Star as his favorite song. The song's romantic lyrics contrast with the man's earlier depiction of himself as a ruthless killer capable of shooting someone in broad daylight. This contradiction humanizes the man, complicating the "us vs. them" dichotomy established earlier in the play that paints Black people as hostile and violent and white people as victims of this **violence** and hostility.

Mike Davis – Mike Davis is an LA-based writer, urban critic, and historian. In Davis's interview, he reflects on the happier, freer childhood he experienced growing up in California in the 1960s. He suggests that in contrast, today's young people have fewer job opportunities and fewer freedoms, compelling them to turn to **violence** and gang membership to find the sense of community and belonging they crave. Davis also laments the shortcomings of the civil rights movement, which failed to give Black kids the same carefree childhood he and his privileged white friends enjoyed in the 1960s.

Paula Weinstein – Paula Weinstein is a movie producer. In her interview, she describes travelling to South-Central Los Angeles with other wealthy, privileged folks who had not been to that part of the city before to distribute food and administer relief to the neighborhood's residents. At the time, the "multiracial / and multicultural line of people" volunteering to come together to help the struggling neighborhood seemed like a sign that change and progress was possible, and that the city's racial tensions could be overcome by people determined to come together in "a kind of Jungian collective unconscious / connection." However, after a year passes and Weinstein observes no tangible, systemic changes, she comes to see this connection as little more than a symbolic gesture. In the end, Weinstein decides, all the riots managed to do was fuel LA's white, wealthy population's preexisting fears about the Black community.

Peter Sellars – Peter Sellars is a director. In his interview, he compares Eugene O'Neill's tragic play *Long Day's Journey into Night* to the riots. In the play, a self-centered patriarch becomes wrapped up in cultural ideals of success at the expense of his family, leaving them to suffer. Sellars sees the riots as a similarly misguided act of self-sabotage on the part of white LA residents. Much of Los Angeles's affluent white population, he suggests sees the riots as separate from their own lives. But he suggests that in reality, their lives are connected to the Black people living in LA and participating in the riots by virtue of living in the same city. Sellars uses the metaphor of a burning house to prove his point, noting how a person isn't safe if the fire is in the basement and they're on the top floor, since the fire will inevitably spread until it destroys the whole house (suggesting that the issues Black LA residents suffer will eventually affect white residents). Sellars sees O'Neill's play and the riots as examples of the failure of the American dream.

Josie Morales – Josie Morales is a clerk-typist and an uncalled witness for the city of Los Angeles in Rodney King's Simi Valley trial. Morales lived next door to George Holliday, the man who recorded King's beating. In her monologue, she talks about staying outside to watch the beating out of a social obligation to bear witness to what she knew was an act of injustice. Morales remembers insisting to the prosecutor, Terry White,

that the officers would be acquitted if the prosecution didn't call a resident as a witness; she even had a dream about it. In the end, Morales's dream came true: all four officers were acquitted in the Simi Valley trial.

Anonymous Male Juror – Smith interviews an anonymous man who served on the jury for Rodney King's Simi Valley trial, in which the jury returned not guilty verdicts to all four officers involved in King's beating. In his monologue, the juror talks about the negative impact serving on the jury has had on his life, describing the death threats and harassment he and the other jurors faced afterward. The juror describes feeling disillusioned by America's justice system, feeling as though he and the other jurors were set up to deliver a not guilty verdict and then scapegoated when the public regarded their decision as racist and unjust.

Gil Garcetti – Gil Garcetti became the district attorney of Los Angeles in 1992, replacing Ira Reiner, who had been in office during the Rodney King beating and the ensuing public unrest. Garcetti defends the jury who delivered the not guilty verdict in King's Simi Valley trial, citing the "really extremely high" burden of proof required in criminal cases. His statements expand on those of the anonymous male juror, who sees himself and the other jurors as being set up by the system to deliver a not guilty verdict and then abandoned and scapegoated by that same system when the public rejected the verdict. Garcetti also describes the "magic" police officers possess on the witness stand, emphasizing that most people want to trust that the police are there to protect and help them. This, Garcetti insists, is why police so often make believable, effective witnesses.

Tom Bradley – Tom Bradley is the former mayor of Los Angeles. In his monologue, he describes working with his staff to draft separate messages to deliver depending on the outcome of Rodney King's Simi Valley trial. He and his staff created a message to deliver in the event of a not guilty verdict, though they doubted they'd need it. The not guilty message voiced Bradley's outrage, while at the same time urging the public to refrain from responding to the unjust verdict with **violence**. Bradley acknowledges the disingenuousness of this message, given how obvious it must have been to anyone who saw the video of King's brutal beating that a not guilty verdict was a grave miscarriage of justice.

Joe Viola – Joe Viola is a television writer who recalls dropping off his daughter's registration forms for Berkeley and witnessing a car pull up with a kid inside toting a nine-millimeter gun and making threats. Viola recalls rushing home to his wife and kids in a panic, feeling disbelief that such **violence** could happen "right *here*," in his neighborhood. Viola's account illustrates his white privilege. Like many of the other white characters Smith interviews, Viola is completely unaccustomed to witnessing the violence and unrest that are an accepted fact of life to the Black youth growing up in the projects.

Anonymous Man #2 – Smith interviews an anonymous Hollywood agent who reflects on the panic and fear that gripped the more affluent, white neighborhoods of Los Angeles as the riots were underway, though no rioting happened in these areas. Nonetheless, he describes how everyone worked "themselves into a frenzy," fleeing for the safety of their homes as though they were being chased by Godzilla. The Hollywood agent's interview reaffirms the "us versus them" narrative put forth by other characters. He suggests that who "they" is doesn't matter, so long as the "they" is a group separate from—and alien to—the "us." While the Hollywood agent recognizes that he's not personally responsible for the unrest among minority communities that fueled the riots, he sees how his willful participation in a broader system of racial inequality makes him complicit.

Captain Lane Haywood – Captain Lane Haywood is a firefighter with the Compton Fire Department. In his interview, Haywood recalls reporting to South-Central with his squad to put out the fires that began during the riot. Haywood describes what little effort the police appeared to put into stopping the looting going on around them, implying that since the neighborhood was predominantly populated by Black people and other minorities, it wasn't a priority to the police force to protect it.

Walter Park – Walter Park is a Korean American store owner and gunshot victim. Walter was shot in the head at a traffic light and forced to undergo a partial lobectomy, permanently changing his life. During his interview with Smith, he is heavily sedated and speaks incoherently of "feel[ing] kinda lonely" and wanting to return to Korea, though he has no idea that his words don't make sense. Smith includes these interviews with Walter Park and his family members to complicate the idea of justice. Giving voice to the riot's victims gives credence to the play's thesis that in an unjust society, one person or community's justice necessarily comes at the expense of another.

June Park – June Park is the wife of Walter Park, who was shot in the head during the 1992 Los Angeles riots and forced to undergo a partial lobotomy. Mrs. Park cries during her interview as she describes visiting her husband in the hospital every day. Her pain makes her a sympathetic character, and it complicates the audience's view of the riots. While the play shows how systemic oppression and police brutality incited and, arguably, justified the riots, it also shows how the riots harmed innocent people.

Reverend Tom Choi – Reverend Tom Choi is a minister at the Westwood Presbyterian Church. In his interview, he recalls going to South Central Los Angeles to help clean up in the aftermath of the riots. In response to criticism he'd heard about Korean Americans not patronizing Black-owned businesses in the neighborhood, he decided to stop by a Black-owned

restaurant for lunch. Choi was surprised to find that the people there greeted him with respect and dignity, and as one of their own rather than as an outsider. The experience made Choi rethink the media's recent outcry over "these people that quote unquote / were supposed to be hostile." In reality, Choi felt nothing but warmth from the Black community.

Bill Bradley – Bill Bradley is a Democratic senator from New Jersey. In his interview, he talks about how the law treats white people and people of color differently. As an example, he recalls a story about a Black friend of his being pulled over and accused of holding a white woman against her will. The friend and the white woman were interns at the same law firm and were headed to the firm's partner's house to attend a weekend brunch. Bradley criticizes the partner for knowing about the incident but failing to use his privilege to call the police commissioner and demand justice for the wronged intern. Bradley argues that people and institutions in positions of power have a moral obligation to use their power to help the oppressed, though his example shows that many privileged people and corporations fail to do so and are therefore complicit in systems of oppression.

Elaine Brown – Elaine Brown is the former head of the Black Panther Party and author of *A Taste of Power*. In her interview, Brown describes the senseless suicide of a young member of the party, Jonathan Jackson, to emphasize how important planning, organization, and foresight are to revolutions. She implicitly criticizes the riots, arguing that if their intent was to wage war against the U.S., they were a lost battle from the start—she insists that the U.S. has not only a surplus of weapons, but a decided eagerness to use force. She's not critical of **violence**, arguing that it's advisable for a person of color to have a gun in the U.S. But she sees Black America's fight for justice as a long-term goal, and insists that it's therefore more important that people who are committed to the cause make informed decisions that keep themselves alive, rather than rash actions that can get them killed.

Homi Bhabha – Homi Bhabha is a literary critic, writer, and scholar. He is a renowned figure in contemporary postcolonial studies. In his interview, he meditates on the ambiguous quality of the twilight hour. Bhabha argues that twilight requires a person to "interpret more," since its light produces a "fuzziness" that makes it difficult to discern the boundaries of distinct shapes. He believes that twilight makes a person "aware / of how [they] are projecting onto the event itself." In contrast, he describes how daylight provides certainty and "clarity," and requires a person only to "react to it" rather than consciously having to understand it. Bhabha's poetic musings resonate within the book's broader theme of the collective consciousness needed to transcend racial tension.

Betye Saar – Betye Saar is an African American visual artist who was part of the Black Arts movement in the 1970s. Her highly political artworks explore racism against Black people in America. In Saar's interview, "Magic #2," she talks about experiencing the protests and meditates on the "surreal," "transition[al]" and ambiguous quality of the **twilight** sky on the first night of the protests. Unlike Homi Bhabha, who sees hope in the ambiguity of twilight, Saar sees powerlessness and evil.

Anonymous Female Student – Smith interviews an anonymous female student enrolled at University of Southern California. The student's monologue begins with a memory of her and her sorority sisters fearing for their lives during the 1992 Los Angeles riots. However, the student quickly transitions into a rambling description of how much her father loves his classic cars, and how he "would die" if they were damaged in the riots. The student indirectly highlights the white privilege that gives white, wealthy interview subjects a very different perspective on the riots than Smith's Black interview subjects.

Dean Gilmour – Dean Gilmour, Lieutenant, serves as the Los Angeles County Coroner. In a rambling interview, he talks about the difficulty of locating human remains in the rubble left behind in the aftermath of the riot. He also reflects more broadly on survivors' need for closure and resolution after a loved one's death. Gilmour's thoughts on closure resonate with the play's bigger questions regarding how to internalize and move on from the riots which created so much fear and unrest in the city and, ultimately, didn't result in all that much change.

Julio Menjivar – Julio Menjivar is a lumber salesman and driver from El Salvador. In his interview, he recalls watching indifferent police officers laugh and jeer at the protestors destroying his neighborhood. He describes how the National Guard was summoned and randomly apprehended and arrested him, even though he was only a witness to the riots and not a participant. Going through this ordeal means that Menjivar now has a record, fines to pay, and three years' probation to fulfill.

Harland W. Braun – Harland W. Braun was Officer Theodore J. Briseno's counsel for his federal trial, where Briseno was tried and acquitted of violating Rodney King's civil rights. In his interview, "Screw Through Your Chest," Braun wonders whether it was truly justice that his client got off while Officer Powell and Sergeant Koon were found guilty. He insinuates that the guilty verdicts were ultimately a meaningless, symbolic gesture on America's part—an effort to pretend that the country has moved beyond systemic racism.

Officer Theodore J. Briseno – Officer Theodore J. Briseno was one of four Los Angeles police officers involved in the Rodney King beating. In their federal trial, Briseno and Officer Timothy E. Wind were acquitted of their charges, while Sergeant Stacey C. Koon and Officer Lawrence M. Powell were found guilty of violating King's civil rights.

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Sergeant Stacey C. Koon – Sergeant Stacey C. Koon was one of the four Los Angeles police officers involved in the Rodney King beating. On April 17, 1992, during the federal King civil rights trial, the jury found Sergeant Koon and Officer Powell guilty of violating Rodney King's civil rights. In his monologue, Harland W. Braun, who was Officer Briseno's counsel during the federal trial, questions whether the jury finding Powell and Koon guilty while acquitting Officer Theodore J. Briseno is true justice or an ultimately empty, symbolic gesture.

Officer Lawrence M. Powell – Lawrence M. Powell was one of the four Los Angeles police officers involved in the Rodney King beating. On April 17, 1992, during the federal King civil rights trial, the jury found Officer Powell and Sergeant Koon guilty of violating Rodney King's civil rights. In Harland W. Braun's monologue, he questions whether finding Powell and Koon guilty is true justice or an empty, symbolic gesture.

Otis Chandler – Otis Chandler is a director of the Times Mirror Company and former editor of the Los Angeles *Times*. In his interview, he expresses a certain hopelessness about the riots' ability to meaningfully change the city's structural problems. Chandler believes people have to be willing to undergo major structural overhauls if they want real change. He insists that it's not enough to claim that symbols of change, such as the federal conviction of two of the LAPD officers involved in Rodney King's beating, will be enough to dismantle LA's deep-seated systemic flaws.

Mrs. Young Soon Han – Mrs. Young Soon Han is a Korean American woman and former owner of a liquor store. In her interview, "Swallowing the Bitterness," she talks about how becoming a victim of the Los Angeles riots (she and many other Korean American storeowners had their businesses destroyed during the riots) challenged her previously held belief that "America is the best." Instead, it caused her to realize that America keeps Korean immigrants at the outskirts of society, denying them privileges afforded to Black Americans who, she insists, "never worked." Mrs. Han wants to be happy for the Black people who found justice in the riots, but she struggles because she feels victimized by the riots and as though she's been denied justice.

Gladis Sibrian – Gladis Sibrian was a nun who fled El Salvador during its bloody civil war. At the time of her interview with Smith, she works as a director and speaks on behalf of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, USA, a leftist Salvadoran political party and one of the main participants in the country's civil war. In her monologue, Sibrian speaks about the Los Angeles riots, revolution, and the impossibility of social change when people don't believe they have power.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Chris Oh – Chris Oh is a medical student, the son of June Park, and the stepson of Walter Park, who was shot in the head at a traffic light during protests and forced to undergo a partial lobectomy. Oh describes his stepfather's shooting as "execution style."

Chung Lee – Chung Lee is the president of the Korean American Victims Association. He describes a phone call in which his neighbor informed him that his store was being looted and, later, set on fire. Lee recalls deciding "to give up / any sense of attachment to [his] possessions."

Richard Kim – Richard Kim is an appliance store owner whose business was situated in South-Central Los Angeles, where much of the rioting took place. He recalls witnessing chaos and gunfire in the streets, describing the situation as "like going to war."

Owen Smet – Owen Smet works for the Culver City Police Department. He's also a former range manager for the Beverly Hills Gun Club. In his interview, Smet discusses how business skyrocketed at the gun club after the riots, exemplifying how the riots frightened LA's white population.

TERMS

Black Panther Party – The Black Panther Party was a Black power political organization founded by Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton in 1966 in Oakland, California. In addition to encouraging its members to monitor the local police department, it facilitated many social programs.

Kerner Commission – The Kerner Commission was a Presidential Commission established in 1967 by President Lyndon B. Johnson. The primary goal of the commission was to investigate the causes of the urban riots that took place throughout the United States during the summer of 1967. Released in 1968, the report concluded that a lack of social services, economic opportunity, police brutality, and racism among America's Black and Latino communities were the riots' primary causes. It called for increased government funds to be put toward social services and the development of housing programs aimed at minimizing residential segregation.

LA Four – The LA Four was the moniker given to the four Black men (Damian Monroe Williams, Henry Keith Watson, Antoine Eugene Miller, and Gary Anthony Williams) involved in the beating of **Reginald Denny** on April 29, 1992, the first day of the 1992 Los Angeles riots.

Proposition F – Proposition F was a 1992 proposed amendment to Los Angeles's city charter designed to impose a term limit of two five-year terms on the LAPD's future chief. Supporters of the amendment argued that it would represent a symbolic shift toward more accountability from the police

department.

Watts Riots – The Watts Riots were an uprising that took place in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles from August 11 to August 16, 1965. It lasted six days and 34 people died.

Watts Truce – The Watts truce was a 1992 peace agreement negotiated among Los Angeles's rival street gangs. It significantly minimized street violence in Los Angeles over the following decades.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

POLICE BRUTALITY, CORRUPTION, AND SYSTEMIC RACISM

Anna Deavere Smith's work of documentary theater, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, consists of a series of monologues derived from interviews she conducted with people who were directly and indirectly impacted by the 1992 Los Angeles riots. The impetus for the 1992 Los Angeles riots was Rodney King's brutal attack by four Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) officers. On March 3, 1991, four LAPD officers beat King during his arrest. On April 29, 1992, a jury voted to acquit all four officers of assault. Within hours of the verdict's announcement, outrage among Los Angeles's racial minorities, who viewed the verdict as yet another instance of the legal system's failure to protect minorities' rights, resulted in six days of deadly riots. While Rodney King's assault was the catalyst that set the rioting in motion, the outrage of LA's minorities, and that of the Black community in particular, stemmed from an established history of social issues and systemic racial inequality.

The combined perspectives of Smith's interview subjects, in particular those of Black residents of Los Angeles, illustrate how the legal system, federal government, and news media each exploit their power to exacerbate social and racial tensions. For instance, in "The Unheard," Congresswoman Maxine Waters explicitly addresses the "lack of services, / lack of government responsive to the people" that the Kerner Commission report identified as the main cause of the urban riots that occurred among the nation's Black and Latino communities in the summer of 1967. Waters states that these same issues caused the 1992 LA riots nearly three decades later. Multiple interview subjects, such as Michael Zinzun, a representative for the Coalition Against Police Abuse, and Teresa Allison, Founder of Mothers Reclaiming Our Children (Mothers ROC), recall personal experiences with police corruption and police brutality. And Paula Weinstein, a movie producer, observes how the media's slanted portrayal of the riots systematically instilled a fear of Los Angeles's African American community in white people, inspiring droves of rich white people to guard their houses and send their children away "as if / the devil was coming after them." In *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, Smith draws from the experiences of Los Angeles's marginalized communities to show how minorities are oppressed and silenced by the institutions that are supposed to empower and protect them.

HEALING, PROGRESS, AND COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

One of the central concerns of *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* is how Los Angeles should move forward in the aftermath of the riots, which occurred in response to the police officers who brutally beat Rodney King being acquitted of all charges. How do oppressed communities begin to heal, Smith asks, and how do racial tensions resolve, when it appears that the city's (and the nation's) institutions have no genuine interest in bringing about that change? Many interview subjects in Smith's play struggle to reconcile their idealistic hopes for a racially-just future with the reality of ignorant or indifferent governments, corrupt legal systems, and people too consumed by hopelessness and devastation to uplift themselves and their communities.

The most promising solution to this problem comes in Smith's final interview, where Twilight Bey, an organizer of the 1992 Watts gang truce, eloquently describes the gap that exists between the self and the outside world. Twilight identifies the self as "darkness" and a knowledge of the outside world as "light." "In order for me to be a, to be a true human being," he argues, "I can't forever dwell in darkness, / I can't forever dwell in the idea, / of just identifying with people like me and understanding me and mine." Essentially, he suggests that people must look beyond their insular communities and get to know people who are different from them. While the play suggests that corrupt institutions like the LAPD bear the brunt of perpetuating racial tensions in LA, it also suggests that it's this inability to look beyond oneself and the suffering of one's own community that makes it difficult for people of different social or ethnic groups to coexist. Smith suggests that a more purposeful effort to engage with one's surroundings, practice empathy and understanding, and see outside of one's own experiences can be the foundation for broader and lasting social and structural changes.

JUSTICE, PERSPECTIVE, AND AMBIGUITY

In *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, Smith presents an ambiguous and often unsatisfying view of justice.

The play rarely depicts an oppressed group or individual person receiving justice without that justice coming at a cost to another group or person. Instead, Smith offers sequences of differing perspectives stemming from a single instance of injustice. For example, a news reporter, Judith Tur, criticizes and dehumanizes Reginald Denny's attackers, the LA 4, calling them "animals" and sympathizing entirely with Denny. Then, Smith offers a less sympathetic view of Denny's attack from Allen Cooper, a Black man and former gang member. He finds it hard to sympathize with Denny, claiming that the nation's uproar over the attack would never have happened were Denny a Black man, demonstrating how distracted he believes the public is from "the real / problem" of systemic racism. Finally, Smith interviews Denny himself, who formed a close bond with four Black people who saved him. He appears to feel no resentment toward those who targeted him because of his race. The effect of offering these three differing perspectives is to highlight how a person's perspective colors their reaction to what happened.

Smith presents these different perspectives to show how notions of justice and injustice, right and wrong, moral and immoral, are complicated and rarely suited to absolute, unwavering judgment. Rodney King's beating was, the play overwhelmingly suggests, an injustice. Many interview subjects characterize the not-guilty verdicts the jury initially gave to his attackers as miscarriages of justice carried out by an unjust legal system. And yet, the play shows how it's not just King, or Black residents of LA, who are victims of the city's flawed justice system: the Korean shop owners who lost their livelihoods in the riots are also victims of violence and oppression. In presenting justice as ambiguous and deeply contextual, Smith suggests that there is no single, authoritative perspective by which one can judge these complex issues.

INDIVIDUALS VS. INSTITUTIONS

Many of Smith's interview subjects harbor resentment for wrongs committed against them, either by an unjust system or by individuals who have turned to violence to air their frustrations against this unjust system. Mrs. Young Soon Han, whose South-Central convenience store was destroyed during the riots, struggles with her feelings of anger toward members of the Black community who participated in the riots that destroyed her store and livelihood. Mrs. Han sees the destruction of her store as indicative of how the U.S. has denied Korean Americans the rights and protections it affords its more privileged citizens. She feels bitterness toward Black people, feeling that the riots gave LA's Black community justice, which remains inaccessible to Korean Americans. Similarly, Paul Parker, chairperson for the Free the LA Four Plus Defense Committee, expresses resentment toward Korean shop owners like Mrs. Han. He uses anti-Semitic language to justify Black protestors' decision to burn down Korean-owned businesses in South-Central: "The Koreans was like the Jews in the day," he states, "and we put them in check." In airing their grievances, both Parker and Han evoke an "us versus them" narrative in which they believe that their respective communities suffer because another community is allowed to flourish. What both parties fail to see, however, is that in blaming another oppressed community, they misdirect blame away from the true source of their oppression: the powerful institutions, such as the corrupt police forces and indifferent or out-of-touch lawmakers, who keep both communities at the periphery of society and silence their voices. In *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, Smith shows how an "us versus them" narrative pits oppressed communities against each other, distracting them from recognizing and challenging the systems responsible for keeping them impoverished and disenfranchised.

ACTION VS. SYMBOLIC GESTURE

Many of Smith's interview subjects talk about the feelings of comradery, purpose, and hopefulness they experienced during and in the immediate aftermath of the 1992 Los Angeles riots. In "Trophies," Paul Parker speaks of how "good for the soul" it felt to "sp[eak] out on April 29," to voice outrage over the LAPD officers' not-guilty verdicts. Parker views the riots as the Black community "puttin' a race of people on notice." In "A Jungian Collective Consciousness," Paula Weinstein, a Hollywood producer, recalls travelling to South-Central Los Angeles, the area where the riots took place, and being a part of a "multiracial / and multicultural line of people" distributing food to the community. She remembers feeling a sense of "community" and believing, if only for a moment, "that it actually could change," that a collective desire for justice and social progress could dismantle an "unjust" system. Of course, she then immediately notes how all this was an illusion, and politicians' talk of change and the perceived unity of the "multicultural" volunteers represented little more than "big gestures." In "Screw Through Your Chest," Harland W. Braun wonders whether it is "the truth of Koon and Powell being guilty / or is it the truth of the society / that has to find them guilty in order to protect itself?" (Koon and Powell were two of King's attackers, who were indicted in a second federal trial.) In other words, were Koon's and Powell's convictions intended to make it look like justice had been served? Instead of explicitly answering this question, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* compares the hopes many had for the future of race relations in Los Angeles to the reality: an city that remained unchanged and fearful after the riots. With this, the play illustrates how institutions that are unwilling to commit to radical change use empty promises, symbolic gestures, and compelling rhetoric to make it seems like things are changing—when in reality, things remain the same.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

TWILIGHT

Twilight symbolizes the ambiguity of justice and the possibility of hope and healing. In "Twilight #1," literary critic, writer, and scholar Homi Bhabha describes twilight as "an in-between moment" that is both night and day. In the aftermath of the Los Angeles riots, Bhabha sees the city as being in a moment of "ambivalence" and possibility. According to Bhabha, "the fuzziness of twilight / allows us to see the intersections / of the event with a number of other things that daylight obscures for / us." In other words, he suggests that the lawlessness of the riots turned all prior expectations about social order and justice upside-down. As Los Angeles struggles to recover from days of violence and social and political upheaval, Bhabha hopes that a new way of seeing and being in the world may emerge from the rubble. The play's closing scene, "Limbo/Twilight #2," told from the perspective of Twilight Bey, the ex-gang member after whom the play is named, expands on Bhabha's understanding of the symbol. Twilight Bey sees himself as embodying twilight in that he portrays himself as "a dark individual" who struggles to look beyond himself at the "light," which he suggests represents wisdom, knowledge, and "the understanding of others." He describes himself as existing in a twilight state of "limbo," where he fails to understand others whose experiences and racial backgrounds are different from his own. Twilight Bey believes that occupying this space between light and dark is essential to transcending the racial tensions that contributed to the unrest. He states, "And I know / that in order for me to be a full human being / I cannot forever dwell in darkness." In other words, to achieve peace and resolution, it is necessary to move through this twilight space, thereby developing mutual understanding among disparate racial and economic groups.

But the ambiguity of twilight means that the symbol carries negative associations as well. In "Magic #2," Betye Saar, an artist, recalls looking up at the twilight sky one night during the riots and seeing the sky—and the city—as existing in "a sort of limbo" that is "maybe even magical." Whereas Homi Bhabha sees hope and possibility in uncertainty, Saar imagines the "evil / and control" that can exist in magic. With the world in a state of limbo, Saar believes that people will be too disoriented and despairing to know how to move forward and rebuild the more just society that Bhabha and Twilight Bey believe is possible.

VIOLENCE

Violence symbolizes the oppression of marginalized communities. Maxine Waters articulates this relationship explicitly in her speech to the First African Methodist Episcopal Church, which serves as the source material for "The Unheard." In this speech, Waters states, "riot / is the voice of the unheard." Waters's statement challenges those who condemn the Los Angeles riots, or reason that protestors using violence to express themselves renders the protestors' messages and grievances invalid. To the contrary, Waters suggests that rioting is the only option available to "the unheard," or those whose voices politicians and law enforcement refuse to listen.

Throughout the play, the characters' varied responses to the violence and destruction the riots caused highlight differences in race, class, and privilege. Many of the play's Black characters welcome the violence, viewing it as a visual manifestation of their despair and frustration at being denied equal treatment in society and under the law. The tangible, highly visual quality of the destruction validates these frustrations as real, substantial, and powerful. Paul Parker is one character who describes the riots favorably, calling them "good for the soul" and "beautiful." Parker states that, "it was some victory. / I mean, it was burnin' everywhere." Like Waters, he sees the violence as if not a remedy for his oppression, then at least a clear expression of the pain and suffering that Black Los Angeles residents suffer. In contrast, some characters with more privileged backgrounds have a more negative view of the violence, viewing it as senseless and unjustified. For example, Judith Tur, the news reporter who shows Smith her video recording of Reginald Denny's attack, compares South-Central to "a war zone" and accuses the protestors of "taking advantage" of the social unrest to commit acts of violence for violence's sake. Her disgust reflects her inability to recognize or sympathize with the systemic oppression that keeps the voices of marginalized communities "unheard," leaving them with no other option but to "riot."

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Anchor edition of *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* published in 1994.

Prologue: My Enemy Quotes

I realized I had an enemy
and that enemy was those nice white teachers.

Related Characters: Rudy Salas, Sr. (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

In the play's first scene, Rudy Salas, Sr., a Mexican American painter and sculptor, talks about his formative experiences with racism, police brutality, and injustice. He remembers being in the first grade and feeling inferior due to the prejudiced way others treated him because of his race. Salas's remark that he "realized [he] had an enemy / and that enemy was those nice white teachers" shows how Salas's own prejudiced attitude toward white people was born of their betrayal: he's reacting to the supposedly "nice" teachers' failure to protect him against discrimination and hurt. Salas isn't clear whether his hatred for the teachers was due to the teachers themselves treating him differently because of his race, or the teachers' failure to interfere with other students' racially targeted attacks. Either way, Salas's admission suggests that institutions of power can be complicit in oppression, both by being openly discriminatory and by failing to protect minorities from discriminatory attacks.

This passage is also crucial in establishing the "us vs. them" dichotomy that arises in many other monologues throughout the play. The racism Salas experienced as a child taught him that his race rendered him fundamentally different from his white classmates. This otherness justified the children's teasing, and the otherness fueled his hatred for prejudiced children and caused him to regard "those nice white teachers," who here function as a stand-in for the broader white population, as Salas's "enemy."

These Curious People Quotes

Why do I have to be on a side?

Related Characters: Stanley K. Sheinbaum (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

Stanley K. Sheinbaum, former president of the Los Angeles Police Commission, recalls being reprimanded by his superiors for trying to talk to, listen to, and understand the gang members involved in negotiating the Watts gang truce at the Nickerson Gardens projects in Los Angeles. Sheinbaum realized then how critical it was for public servants to understand the communities they serve.

Shortly after Sheinbaum's attempt to learn from the gang members, he received a letter in the mail that accused him of engaging with the "enemy." He was later accused of being on the wrong "side" of the law. In response to these accusations, the question Sheinbaum raises, "Why do I have to be on a side?" challenges the boundaries that separate law enforcement from citizens. Sheinbaum's critics see law enforcement as fundamentally different from the gang members. Sheinbaum's question breaks down this fundamental difference, suggesting that there is no such thing as sides—that police officers aren't fundamentally different from the communities they serve just because they wear a badge.

Sheinbaum's question also alludes to how individuals in power, such as law enforcement, exploit or hide behind their respective institutions. His question proposes the idea that police might be more effective if officers ceased using their institutional ties as a barrier between themselves and civilians, and instead tried to level with civilians and understand their needs.

They Quotes

Who's They?

Related Characters: Jason Sanford (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

This passage opens actor Jason Sanford's monologue. It illustrates the central thesis of his argument, which is that systemic racism is predicated on an "us vs. them" dichotomy. While the "us" and "them" might change to suit the demographics of a particular place, what is most important about the dichotomy is that it divides and creates tension between disparate communities.

Sanford goes on to talk about his childhood growing up in Santa Barbara, where the "them" was the Latino community, and the "Us" was privileged white people. His anecdotes illustrate just one way "us vs. them" can break down; in other places, like South-Central Los Angeles, where rioters targeted Korean American businesses during the riots, "us vs. them" becomes opposition between the Korean American and Black communities.

Sanford's question "who's they?" encapsulates some of the play's fundamental concerns: how society divides different races, ethnicities, and classes of people, and how institutions in power enforce these divisions by preying on fears and pitting marginalized communities against one another. Ultimately, who "they" are is secondary to the

notion that "they" are outsiders who pose a threat to the welfare of "us." Sanford suggests that all racial tension derives from this socially conditioned impulse to protect one's own from the threat of an unspecified "they."

Lightning But No Rain Quotes

"These police officers are just like you and I.
Take that damn uniform off of 'em,
they the same as you and I.
Why do they have so much power?
Why does the system work for them?
Where can we go
to get the justice that they have?

Related Characters: Theresa Allison

Related Themes:

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

Theresa Allison, a founding member of Mothers Reclaiming Our Children (Mothers ROC), an advocacy organization for mothers whose sons were arrested on false or exaggerated charges, talks about her experiences dealing with the corrupt LAPD and their campaign to apprehend her son, Dewayne. This passage comes from the end of Allison's monologue, after she has described the LAPD's campaign to apprehend Dewayne on false charges and spoken about the various other ways law enforcement has abused their authority to brutalize and discriminate against the Black community.

Allison finds this abuse of power particularly abhorrent because she believes that police officers' claims to power are entirely arbitrary to begin with. "These police officers are just like you and I," Allison claims. "Take that damn uniform off of 'em, / they the same as you and I." Allison criticizes the heightened power that police officers—who are just people—gain by aligning themselves with the larger, corrupt institution of law enforcement. Allison's claim that police officers' uniforms imbue them with an inflated sense of power functions as a metaphor for the broader way in which institutions (law enforcement, the federal government, or the judicial system, for instance) gain outsize power and then disenfranchise and discriminate against marginalized communities.

Where the Water Is Quotes

"You took upper-body-control holds away from us.
Now we're really gonna show you what you're gonna get,
with lawsuits and all the other things that are associated with it."

Related Characters: Sergeant Charles Duke (speaker), Daryl Gates, Rodney King

Related Themes:

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

Sergeant Charles Duke concludes his monologue by voicing what he suspects was the mindset of Daryl Gates and the LAPD Command staff after the Los Angeles City Council and Police Commission imposed new regulations that banned the use of upper-body-control holds.

In 1982, the Los Angeles City Council and Police Commission called for a ban on upper-body-control holds, citing a higher number of fatalities among apprehended people, primarily Black people, on whom officers were using this technique. According to Duke, LAPD chief Daryl Gates and his command staff retaliated against the ban by calling for the implementation of batons, knowing that this use-of-force technique would lead to an influx in lawsuits that the City Council and Police Commission would then have to deal with.

If Duke's suspicions are correct, Rodney King's attack was more than an abhorrent incident of police brutality. It was also a political maneuver intended to punish the City Council and Police Commission for their bureaucratic interference with police activity—at the expense of Black bodies. Duke's suspicion reveals a new layer of the LAPD's corrupt policing, illuminating their blatant disregard for the welfare of Black citizens. Put another way, Duke suggests that Gates sees Black victims of police brutality as totally reasonable sacrifices, something that deprives those people of their humanity and their dignity.

Indelible Substance Quotes

"No."
I said, "We have to stay here
and watch
because this is wrong."

Related Characters: Josie Morales (speaker), Rodney King

Related Themes:

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

Josie Morales, an uncalled witness for the prosecution in Rodney King's Simi Valley trial, recalls standing outside her home to witness King's attack. At the time, Morales lived next door to George Holliday, the man who recorded the video of the attack that was then forwarded to the media and broadcast nationwide. Morales's husband had urged her to go back inside and refrain from watching the attack, but Morales insisted that they watch, "because this is wrong." Morales's logic suggests that people have a moral obligation to bear witness to acts of injustice. From a practical position, doing so enables them to serve as witnesses in future legal proceedings related to the injustice.

Morales's insistence on witnessing King's beating also speaks to the play's suggestion that people must accept others' experiences and hardships as their responsibility, too, if they want a future of change and social progress. Much of the racial tension the play presents exists, in part, because people are unwilling to reach across ethnic and class boundaries. People remain primarily concerned with issues that affect themselves or their communities and remain willing to turn a blind eye to issues that do not affect them directly. Symbolically, Morales's decision to bear witness to King's assault reflects an effort to address social ills through conscious engagement with the rest of the world.

Your Heads in Shame Quotes

I mean, the jurors as a group, we tossed around:
was this a setup of some sort?
We just feel like we were pawns that were thrown away by the system.

Related Characters: Anonymous Male Juror (speaker), Rodney King

Related Themes:

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

An anonymous male juror reflects on the harassment, judgment, and threats he and the other jurors received after delivering a not guilty verdict to the LAPD officers involved in the beating of Rodney King. Elected officials, private citizens, and the judge presiding over the Simi Valley trial condemned the jurors' decision, which caused them to feel "tossed around," as though they had been part of "a setup of some sort." The juror believes the system is scapegoating the jury to avoid taking responsibility for the racist, unjust systems that gave the police the authority to beat King in the first place and provided them with legal processes that allowed a jury to find them not guilty.

Because a criminal trial places the burden of proof on the prosecution (that is, the trial asked Rodney King's lawyers to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that the police officers were guilty), the jury was all but forced to deliver a verdict of not guilty if they wanted to take their civic responsibilities seriously. The juror suggests that the system gave them no choice but to deliver a not guilty verdict—even if that legal verdict didn't align with their moral stance on King's beating. For this reason, the juror insists that it's unfair and inaccurate for politicians and other public figures to suggest that the jury is entirely to blame for their verdict. In reality, corrupt policing, the U.S. judicial system, and unconscious cultural conditioning were among the systemic forces that propelled the jury to come to a legal conclusion that, for many of them, did not align with their moral feelings about King's beating.

Magic Quotes

At least in a courtroom setting
that magic comes in.
You want to believe the officers
because they are there to help you,
the law-abiding citizen,
because most jurors have not had contacts
with police—
if they have
it's a traffic ticket
or they did a sloppy job
investigating their burglary
but not enough that it sours them on the police.

Related Characters: Gil Garcetti (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 74-75

Explanation and Analysis

Gil Garcetti, former district attorney for the city of Los Angeles, explains why police officers make compelling, effective witnesses in court. The main reason for this is that

most U.S. citizens "want to believe the officers / because they are there to help [them]." In addition, because the average juror will not have "had contacts / with police," or, if they have, those contacts would have been inconsequential, they retain the common understanding that the police are there to protect and serve the public, causing the police to seem trustworthy.

Garcetti refers to this phenomenon as a type of "magic," which imbues police officers' testimonies with an automatic aura of credibility and stability. Garcetti's presentation of the phenomenon as "magic" isn't quite correct. It obscures the responsibility that systemic forces play in making officers seem credible. In reality, cultural conditioning to trust the police, fear, a desire for protection against lawlessness, and a likely discriminatory jury selection process are all factors that contribute to a jury that's willing to take an officer's word. Indeed, as Garcetti describes jurors' hypothetical past experiences with police, it becomes clear that juries don't necessarily include, for instance, gang members or people from minority groups with fraught relationships to the police.

War Zone Quotes

❝ As far as I'm concerned,
nobody is better than me,
I'm not better than anybody else.
People are people.
Black, white, green, or purple, I don't care,
but what's happening in South Central now,
I think they're taking advantage.

Related Characters: Judith Tur (speaker), Reginald Denny, Rodney King

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

Judith Tur, the news reporter who shows Smith her video recording of Reginald Denny's beating, explains why she believes Denny's assailants are monsters who are not worthy of sympathy. While Tur begins by insisting that she is not racist, her language nevertheless suggests she holds racist views against the Black people in South Central.

While Tur claims that she is "not better than anybody else" and that "people are people" regardless of whether they are "Black, white, green, or purple," she quickly launches into an attack on the rioters in South Central, claiming that "they're taking advantage" of the acquittals in King's Simi Valley to commit senseless acts of violence. Tur's accusation that rioters are "taking advantage" shows her lack of sympathy for the disproportionate instances of police brutality that Black people face compared to other demographics. In claiming that the rioters are "taking advantage" of the verdict, she implies that police brutality against Black people doesn't exist or isn't a problem worth protesting—or a problem at all. Furthermore, Tur's impulse to talk about the Black rioters as a single, homogenous entity rather than individual people with disparate, personal grievances to air in the riots suggests a willingness to dehumanize and devalue Black people and their experiences.

Bubble Gum Machine Man Quotes

❝ Anything is never a problem 'til the black man gets his hands on it.
It was good for the NRA
to have fully automatic weapons,
but when the Afro-American people got hold of 'em,
it was a crime!

Related Characters: Allen Cooper "Big Al" (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 101-102

Explanation and Analysis

Cooper, an ex-gang member, reflects on growing up in the projects and experiencing discrimination and police brutality. He also reflects on overarching issues that affect the Black community, such as the double standards that society and powerful institutions apply to Black people and white people.

Cooper states, "Anything is never a problem 'til the black man gets his hands on it." He cites fully automatic weapons as an example of a personal freedom that society approves of when white people enjoy it but condemns when Black people exercise that same liberty. "It was good for the NRA / to have fully automatic weapons," explains Cooper, referring to the National Rifle Association, "but when the Afro-American people got hold of 'em, / it was a crime!" Cooper's criticism of the double standards society applies to Black and white gun ownership resonates with the "us vs. them" dichotomy that the play suggests is at the crux of racial tension and inequality. To borrow Cooper's logic, it's not

fully automatic weapons that propel lawmakers to crack down on gun law—it's the threat that the "them," who are seen as dangerous outsiders, are enjoying the same liberties as the "us," or the insiders.

This Reginald Denny thing is a joke.
It's joke.
That's just a delusion to the real
problem.

Related Characters: Allen Cooper "Big Al" (speaker), Reginald Denny, Rodney King

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 102

Explanation and Analysis

Allen Cooper criticizes the national uproar generated by media broadcasts of the attack on Reginald Denny, a white truck driver whom four Black men (the LA Four) racially targeted during the riots. This passage identifies a distinction between "the real / problem" of systemic oppression and police brutality that Black people experience regularly, and the "delusion" created by the media that the racially motivated attacks like Reginald Denny's and Rodney King's are isolated, unusual incidents.

Cooper implies that the media's fixation with both cases obscures "the real / problem" that, for many Black people, the recorded and sensationalized attacks actually happen regularly and don't attract moral outrage from the general public. He cynically believes that the public's anger over Rodney King's case is nothing more than empty, symbolic moral posturing. Society, Cooper suggests, simply wants to absolve itself of its sins against Black people by getting angry. And this, he suggests, is an easy alternative to putting in the time or funds required to fix the "the real / problem" of systemic inequality.

To Look Like Girls from Little Quotes

If she didn't caught it in her arm,
me and her would be dead.
See?
So it's like
open your eyes,
watch what is goin' on.

Related Characters: Elvira Evers (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 123

Explanation and Analysis

Elvira Evers, a convenience store worker, talks about being pregnant and shot in the stomach during the riots. After Evers gave birth via emergency cesarian section, a doctor removed the bullet, which was wedged in the baby's elbow. This saved Evers and her daughter: had the bullet kept going deeper into their bodies, they both would have died.

This passage underscores the central role human connection plays in alleviating racial tensions and inspiring social progress. The wisdom Evers gleans from being "saved" by her baby having "caught [the bullet] in her arm" becomes a metaphor for the life-saving possibilities of "open[ing] your eyes" to the world, which the play suggests can help a person move past racial and class boundaries to connect with other people.

Overwhelmingly, the play suggests that just as Evers and her baby would have died had the baby not caught the bullet in her arms, shielding oneself from the world and ignoring others' suffering can be self-defeating and can have harmful consequences. Primarily, ignoring that other people are suffering means those people continue to suffer—so nothing changes. However, if a person "open[s] [their] eyes" to "watch what is goin' on," they leave themselves open to experience shared, collective consciousness, empathy, and understanding. In turn, the play suggests, this can lead to policy-driven social change.

That's Another Story Quotes

Who the hell does he think he is?
Oh, but that was another story.
they lootin' over here,
but soon they loot this store he went to,
oh, he was all pissed.

Related Characters: Katie Miller (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 133

Explanation and Analysis

Katie Miller, an accountant and bookkeeper, recalls the media's response to the looting and burning of businesses that occurred during the riots. She remembers how nobody (that is, white people) really cared when looters targeted minority-owned businesses. However, this indifference turned to outrage when rioters began targeting businesses frequented by the wealthy.

Miller remembers how Paul Moyer, a newscaster, became suddenly enraged once the rioters targeted a luxury department store he frequented in childhood: "they loot this store he went to, / oh, he was all pissed," states Miller. Miller suggests that Moyer's concerns about the looting only began once he had a personal stake in the unrest. That is, it's not the principle of looting itself that Moyer opposes, but the notion that Black people can exert power and dominance over Moyer's life, physically destroying a place that holds some of his most cherished memories.

This is a common thought process among the play's privileged characters, who seem to believe that they can disregard the social ills that do not affect them directly (such as a corrupt police force, broken infrastructure in the projects, and gang violence) and carry on with their lives. They see themselves as removed from and wholly unaffected by the crises that plague LA's disadvantaged communities. However, the riots reveal the misguided nature of this logic and show privileged people like Moyer that they exist in a much larger system that encompasses underprivileged, vulnerable minority communities as well as more affluent white ones.

The Beverly Hills Hotel Quotes

❝ No one can hurt us at the Beverly Hills Hotel
'cause it was like a fortress.

Related Characters: Elaine Young (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 155

Explanation and Analysis

Elaine Young, a wealthy real-estate agent, details the evenings during the riots she spent with a crowd of other wealthy people at the Polo Lounge in the Beverly Hills Hotel, far removed from the neighborhoods where the actual riots were taking place. She and the others who converged at the hotel took comfort in one another's company, relying on the logic of safety in numbers to reassure themselves that they would emerge from the riots unscathed. In fact, Young refers to the hotel as "a fortress" that shielded her from the crisis that played out in South-Central.

This passage shows how out of touch Young and the other affluent citizens of Los Angeles are with the reality of life for the city's disadvantaged communities. When a reporter later interviews Young for a story about the Polo Lounge's closing, she recounts the time she spent there during the riots. Young's seeming admission to partying at the Beverly Hills Hotel while a subset of the city was in a state of crisis prompts a stranger to write to Young, accusing her of making light of the riots and being out of touch. Young insists that it was not her intention to minimize the seriousness of the riots.

At the same time, her conviction that the Beverly Hills Hotel could be a "fortress" that she and its other wealthy patrons could hide behind reflects their immense privilege. For affluent people like Young, wealth, race, and social status are all metaphorical "fortress[es]" they can leverage to seek respite from the social ills that poor communities cannot as easily escape.

I Was Scared Quotes

❝ All I can think of...one bottle,
one shear from one bottle in my father's car,
he will die!
He will die.

Related Characters: Anonymous Female Student (speaker), Anna Deavere Smith

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 157

Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes from the monologue of an anonymous female college student whom Smith interviewed for the play. The University of Southern California student describes taking shelter with other women inside her sorority house. She remembers being afraid for her life, terrified that the rioters would enter the house, as they had during the Watts riots decades before. However, she immediately shifts focus away from her recollection of visceral fear to mention how she advised her parents, who

were driving to California as part of a caravan of vintage 1940s cars, not to venture into Los Angeles, fearing what would happen if the rioters damaged her father's prized 1941 Cadillac.

"All I can think of…one bottle, / one shear from one bottle in my father's car, / he will die!" states the woman. The immediacy of death juxtaposed with the triviality of its cause—a car getting scraped—shows how the woman's privilege makes her out of touch with the reality of the crisis for those not protected by wealth and status. People died in the riots, yet the woman's primary concern is how her father will figuratively "*die*" if someone scratches his car. The woman's genuine concern for her father's car shows how privilege can isolate people, leaving them uncaring and unaware of the struggles that other, less privileged people experience. She appears incapable of entertaining the idea that actual harm—not just the destruction of superficial personal property—could befall her or her family, so her concerns about her own life with which she begins her monologue are short-lived.

The Unheard Quotes

riot
is the voice of the unheard.

Related Characters: Maxine Waters (speaker), Rodney King

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 162

Explanation and Analysis

This passage draws from a speech that Maxine Waters delivered to the First African Methodist Episcopal Church in the aftermath of the officers' acquittals at Rodney King's Simi Valley trial. Waters's speech and this line, in particular, are critical to developing violence as a symbol of oppression.

In her speech, Waters draws from the Watts riots of 1965 and the Kerner Commission report, published in 1968, to explain and justify the public unrest and violence Los Angeles experienced after the first Rodney King trial. The Kerner Commission report affirmatively stated that the civil unrest and rioting going on in urban areas of the U.S. during the summer of 1967 was due to a lack of employment opportunities, police brutality, and broader institutional racism. However, the federal government effectively ignored these findings and the report's recommendations to address racial tensions and social unrest.

Waters sees the 1992 riots as history repeating itself, portraying the riots as marginalized communities attempting to air grievances that the government has failed to hear or outright ignored. When Waters claims that "riot / is the voice of the unheard," she suggests that people from marginalized communities who cannot compel the government to listen to them in other ways have no choice but to pursue alternate means of voicing their complaints—and sometimes, these alternate means involve violence. For people whose voices bureaucracy and systemic racism have silenced, violence is the only way to be heard. Waters's remark justifies the riots and frames the violence they caused as a symbolic expression of Black oppression and despair.

Trophies Quotes

Because Denny is white,
that's the bottom line.
If Denny was Latino,
Indian, or black,
they wouldn't give a damn
they would not give a damn.

Related Characters: Paul Parker (speaker), Reginald Denny, Rodney King

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 172

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Paul Parker explains why he has little sympathy for Reginald Denny, a white truck driver whom Black rioters (the LA Four) targeted and attacked during the 1992 Los Angeles riots. Like Rodney King's beating, Denny's was videotaped, broadcast to the world, and the cause of much public outrage. In fact, Denny's attack became the most infamous act of violence connected to the riots outside of King's beating.

Parker takes issue with the public's outrage over Denny's beating, arguing that "If Denny was Latino, / Indian, or black / they wouldn't give a damn" about his injuries. To Parker, Denny's race is exactly why his attack attracted so much

public outrage. Furthermore, he regards this outrage as yet another example of how society prioritizes the safety, needs, and justice of privileged white people over those of Black people and other minorities. Corrupt police officers beat Black and Latino people every day, Parker suggests. However, while these kinds of altercations pile up without a word, all it takes is a single white man being attacked and beaten to send the media into a frenzy.

> We spoke out on April 29.
> Hoo (*real pleasure*),
> it was flavorful,
> it was juicy.
> It was, uh,
> it was good for the soul.

Related Characters: Paul Parker (speaker), Elaine Young, Judith Tur, Maxine Waters, Anna Deavere Smith

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 174

Explanation and Analysis

Paul Parker talks about what the riots meant to him. The entire act, "War Zone," places the audience in the action of the riots, giving voice to people who participated in or were affected or victimized by them in one way or another. In particular, the act focuses on the violence and destruction the riots wrought on the community and businesses. It grapples with the difficult question of whether such violence is justified when innocent people, such as the Korean American shopkeepers whose businesses rioters destroyed, are hurt in the process.

Parker fully embraces the violence, describing it as a "real pleasure." Describing the riots as when the Black community "spoke out on April 29" evokes Maxine Waters's formulation of riots as the voice of silenced communities. Like Waters, Parker views the riots as marginalized communities making their grievances known and their frustrations heard by a larger society that ignores and refuses to hear them when they voice these issues nonviolently. Parker's subsequent description of the riots as "good for the soul" suggests, somewhat counterintuitively, the humanizing effect of committing acts of violence. Parker's formulation implies that committing acts of violence brought visibility to the Black community and their struggles. If ignoring a community's needs and concerns dehumanizes them, then Parker sees that the opposite—ensuring that the community has no choice but to see the community—has a humanizing, soul-affirming effect.

Parker's embrace of the violence stands in stark contrast to the more privileged citizens' accounts of the riots. For instance, Elaine Young and Judith Tur are gripped by fear and anger, viewing the riots as a threat to their comfortable, safe way of life.

Long Day's Journey into Night Quotes

> This is the city we are living in.
> It's our house.
> We all live in the same house…
> Right, start a fire in the basement
> and, you know,
> nobody's gonna be left on the top floor.
> It's one house.
> And shutting the door in your room,
> it doesn't matter.

Related Characters: Peter Sellars (speaker), Anna Deavere Smith

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 200

Explanation and Analysis

Peter Sellars evokes the image of a burning house to explain why racial inequality and systemic oppression affect more than whoever's being oppressed. More broadly, Sellars's house metaphor illustrates how participating in society connects a person to their fellow citizens. "We all live in the same house," Sellars states, referring to what he suggests should be an obvious fact: that everyone in Los Angeles exists in the same city and the same system.

Smith presents numerous accounts from privileged subjects who believe that communities ravaged by gang activity, poverty, and a lack of opportunity for economic advancement do not concern them. They reason that in "shutting the door in [their] room[s]," they can distance themselves from the social ills that affect other people—but not themselves. Sellars dismisses this logic as ludicrous, using the example of a house fire to show how systemic issues affect everybody involved—not just the most vulnerable, disadvantaged communities. "Right, start a fire

in the basement / and, you know, / nobody's gonna be left on the top floor." In other words, issues like poverty, gang violence, and police brutality that characterize life in the projects, the city's metaphorical "basement," will not stay confined for long, nor can the city's privileged citizens stop the upward spread of social ills by "shutting the door in [their] room[s]" and turning their backs on injustice. Sooner or later, the fire will spread, and "nobody's gonna be left on the top floor."

The riots are an example of this principle in action. Racial tensions that had been brewing for decades finally came to a head after Rodney King's beating and the subsequent acquittal of the officers involved incited widespread outrage to mutate into a full-fledged uprising that dragged the entire city into a state of crisis.

I Remember Going... Quotes

❝ After a couple of days
I stopped wearing the collar
and I realize that if there's any protection I needed
it was just whatever love I had in my heart to share with people that
proved to be enough,
the love that God has taught me to share.
That is what came out in the end for me.

Related Characters: Reverend Tom Choi (speaker), Twilight Bey

Related Themes:

Page Number: 203

Explanation and Analysis

Reverend Tom Choi, a Chinese American minister with the Westwood Presbyterian Church, talks about helping with cleanup efforts after the riots had ended. Fueled by racial tensions between the Korean and Black communities, rioters targeted many Korean American businesses during the riots. In light of these tensions, Choi, who is of Chinese descent, feared for his safety and wore his clerical collar in the predominantly Black neighborhood as a symbolic layer of protection.

However, when Choi went to a Black-owned restaurant for lunch that day, patrons greeted him not with skepticism or ire but with compassion. People there were just trying to survive in the aftermath of the riots and treated Choi as a fellow person trying to heal and find a path forward in the aftermath of a great crisis. In his monologue, Choi explains how the positive and unexpected kinship he experienced with the Black community made him realize that sharing "whatever love [he] had in [his] heart" offers him more protection than any physical, legal, or symbolic barrier, like his clerical collar. Choi's realization supports the play's insistence that people should sympathize with and try to understand those they see as fundamentally different, rather than fearing and ostracizing others.

Choi's realization feeds into the observation Twilight Bey makes in the final scene. In it, Bey argues that living inside oneself and the struggles of one's community, without branching out to understand the struggles of others, leaves one a partially formed human. He insists that being a fully formed, functioning human requires a person to contribute positively and compassionately to the collective "system" they share with others. Using this logic, Choi is becoming a more fully-formed person by developing empathy and a sense of community with the Black people in this restaurant.

A Jungian Collective Unconscious Quotes

❝ you believed
that it actually could change,
and of course
here we are a year later.
(seven-second pause)
didn't change.
All
the
language
was there,
and all the big gestures
were there[.]

Related Characters: Paula Weinstein (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 210-211

Explanation and Analysis

Paula Weinstein, a movie producer, recalls the feeling of community and togetherness she experienced while volunteering with other Los Angeles citizens in the neighborhoods affected by the riots. Weinstein's optimism is rooted in the possibility that a desire for change, progress, and healing at the individual level might be strong enough to overcome the oppressive institutions that often stand in the way of change and healing. Indeed, Weinstein's hopes for the future are quickly dashed when life and society return

to normal. States Weinstein, "All / the / language / was there, / and all the big gestures / were there." Weinstein describes the "language" and "big gestures" she witnessed, suggesting that her belief that the world really "could change" was nothing more than her being fooled by empty, symbolic gestures. In reality, no change occurred. As she sees it, everyone was merely performing outward gestures of solidarity and hope.

Weinstein's observation cynically suggests that people are fooling themselves into thinking that putting on a show of solidarity and collective experience is enough to inspire change in the long run. No matter how well-meaning, she discovers that individual people are incapable of causing change at the macro-level. Grassroots organizing that relies on performative gesture alone and isn't in it for the long run cannot contend with established institutions.

Application of the Laws Quotes

and the moral power of those institutions have to be brought to bear
in the public institutions, which in many places are not fair.
To put it mildly.
Right? And the application of the law
before which we are all in *theory* equal.

Related Characters: Bill Bradley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 217

Explanation and Analysis

Billy Bradley, a Democratic senator from New Jersey, talks about the moral responsibility that private institutions have to use their power to ensure that public institutions practice equal justice and application of the law. While the play suggests that individual people often have little power to remedy systemic oppression, people associated with powerful institutions (such as the federal government) are uniquely positioned to enact change. Bradley suggests that they are therefore morally obligated to use their power to enact change.

Bradley's remarks follow an anecdote about a Black friend; the police wrongfully apprehended the friend while he was driving to brunch at the home of a partner at the law firm at which he was interning. The partner learned of the injustice but did nothing about it. Bradley suggests that the partner should have used the relative sway his position of power at the firm afforded him to address the act of injustice at the systemic level, such as by contacting the state government. When people in positions of power do not use that power to make changes at the systemic level, they become complicit in systems of oppression. And Bradley suggests that this is true even if they personally do not participate in discriminatory behavior.

Finally, Bradley's remark that all people are "in *theory* equal" in the eyes of the law points to the ways corrupt institutions oppress people. Though all races and genders and classes of people are "in theory" guaranteed the same rights, corrupt policing and discriminatory practices mean that that law, in practice, is rarely applied equally.

Screw Through Your Chest Quotes

Is it the truth of Koon and Powell being guilty
or is it the truth of the society
that has to find them
guilty in order to protect itself?

Related Characters: Harland W. Braun (speaker), Rodney King, Officer Theodore J. Briseno, Sergeant Stacey C. Koon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 243

Explanation and Analysis

Harland W. Braun, who served as defense counsel for Officer Briseno, one of the policemen charged with Rodney King's assault, ruminates on what constitutes justice for Rodney King. Braun's remarks challenge the notion that convicting Officer Powell and Sergeant Koon represents true, meaningful justice. Instead, Braun suggests that it was entirely arbitrary that his client, Briseno, was acquitted while these other two officers were convicted.

Braun's remark implies that the guilty convictions are little more than symbolic gestures the federal court has handed out to do damage control, essentially acquiescing to the rioters' demands as a practical measure to quell public unrest. It is a strategic move on the government's part to end the riots—not a genuine act of justice intended to right the wrong committed upon King.

Braun's cynical take extends sympathy toward officers convicted. At the same time, it questions people's ability to receive justice, if justice isn't going to make society look good. When he asks, "is it the truth of the society / that has to find them / guilty in order to protect itself?" he frames the convictions as insincere and justice as unreached. The convictions aren't a victory for those who felt an injustice

had been committed against King, since the convictions don't actually change anything about policing at a systemic level. Instead, the convictions are merely a short-term solution for society "to protect itself" against immediate future violence.

Swallowing the Bitterness Quotes

In a way I was happy for them
and I felt glad for them.
At leasteh 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 to centuries
(One hit simultaneous with "centuries")
and I have a lot of sympathy and understanding for them.

Related Characters: Mrs. Young Soon Han (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 248

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Young-Soon Han is a former liquor store owner whose business was destroyed during the riots. In her emotional monologue, she explains her struggle to sympathize with Black protestors while simultaneously being a victim of those protests. Her voice is essential in exploring the racial tensions between Korean American people and Black people in Los Angeles in the late 20th century. Her input illustrates how oppressive institutions gather strength and power from egging on racial tensions between marginalized communities, compelling them to see each other as enemies rather than themselves as victims of the same oppressive system.

Mrs. Han's anger is nuanced and complex. Though Black rioters deprived her of her store and her livelihood, she still feels sympathetic to the Black community and acknowledges their struggle for justice. She just wishes that Korean American people, who are not eligible to receive the benefits and social services that Black citizens are, would also receive their justice.

Another critical element of this passage is how Mrs. Han takes issue with the dominant narrative of the riots that has decided to "forget" the Korean American shopkeepers whose businesses were destroyed. Mrs. Han sees the dominant narrative of the riots as simplistic and complicit in the erasure of Korean victimhood. She also sees this erasure as just another example of the broader, overarching way in which U.S. society marginalizes Korean immigrants. In vocalizing her frustrations, Mrs. Han offers a nuanced look into how unjust systems maintain power by pitting marginalized communities against each other, ensuring that one community's justice comes at the expense of another community's livelihood or safety.

Limbo/Twilight #2 Quotes

I am a dark individual,
and with me stuck in limbo,
I see darkness as myself.
I see the light as knowledge and the wisdom of the world and understanding others,
in order for me to be a, to be a true human being,
I can't forever dwell in darkness,
I can't forever dwell in the idea,
of just identifying with people like me and understanding me and mine.

Related Characters: Twilight Bey (speaker), Homi Bhabha , Betye Saar

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 255

Explanation and Analysis

In the final monologue of the play, Twilight Bey explores what the twilight hour means to him. Like Homi Bhabha and Betye Saar, Twilight characterizes the twilight hour as being "stuck in limbo," caught between night and day, yesterday and tomorrow. He goes a step further and establishes an additional binary relationship between himself, who is "a dark individual" and represents the night side of twilight, and "the light as knowledge," which represents the day side of twilight and "the wisdom in the world and / understanding others."

Twilight Bey believes that twilight exists as an in-between space between the self and the world. When a person or community finds themselves immersed in the metaphorical twilight hour—in the moment of uncertainty and unease that arises in the aftermath of a crisis, such as the

riots—they must take advantage of the situation to cross the boundary and establish interconnectedness and understanding between themselves and the world. It is only through this interconnectedness (which he and the play characterize as transcending boundaries of race, class, and geography) that a person can "be a true human being," exist in a state of collective consciousness with others, and practice the empathy that is necessary to create meaningful, long-term social and systemic change.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE: MY ENEMY

Smith interviews Rudy Salas, Sr., a sculptor and painter. Salas sits at the dining room table in a captain's chair. He is a large, warm man who wears hearing aids in both ears. His wife, Margaret, walks around the room and listens to the interview. He fidgets in his chair as he speaks of his grandfather, N. Carnación, who was a "gringo hater" due to a number of bad run-ins he had with them during his time riding with Villa. Salas's grandfather influenced Salas's dislike of white people growing up. This dislike grew when, in the first grade, people claimed that he was "inferior / because [he] was a Mexican." It was then that Salas learned who his enemy was: "those nice white teachers."

Salas's early encounters with prejudice instill in him a hatred for the white people who tried to convince him that his race made him "inferior." He underscores his hatred with his use of the term "gringo," a derogatory slur used to refer to Caucasian people. As well, his reference to riding with Pancho Villa, a bandit who became a key general in the Mexican Revolution in the early 20th century, underscores his pride in his Mexican heritage. Salas's opening monologue introduces the way systemic racism compels people to adopt an "us versus them" mindset toward different races. Furthermore, the fact that he learned to regard "those nice white teachers" as his enemy shows that systemic racism teaches marginalized communities to distrust figures that people who are accepted by the dominant culture are taught to trust and respect.

Salas describes how his "insanity" took root after he suffered a police beating in 1942, when he was a teenager "running around as a zoot-suiter." After he threw a punch in self-defense, four cops took him to a room and began kicking him in the head, fracturing his eardrum and leading to temporary deafness. From that day forth, Salas "had an insane hatred / for white policemen." He conveys sympathy for his poor wife who has to hear him "rant and rave" about "these goddamned peckerwoods" every time he hears a news story about police brutality.

In describing his internalized hatred for white policemen as an "insanity," Salas reinforces the notion of systemic racism as a social illness. He continues this extended metaphor, likening his expressions of hatred and frustration as a "rant and rave" of a mentally unwell person. Salas's account presents racism and prejudice as more than just bad behavior exhibited by a select few. In portraying racism and prejudice as an illness, Salas implies that racism is endemic to U.S. society.

As a grown man, Salas reminds his boys always to cooperate and put their hands up if they're ever in an altercation with the police. He recalls how his son, Stephen, came home from Stanford one weekend to sing with a band and had a cop put a gun to his head. Salas can't believe that the things that happened to him decades ago are still happening to his sons.

That Salas's sons experience similar instances of racism in their lives half a century later speaks to how little progress society has made to lessen racial tensions.

THESE CURIOUS PEOPLE

Smith interviews Stanley K. Sheinbaum, former president of the Los Angeles Police Commission. Sheinbaum sits in his beautiful house in Brentwood. He appears gruff, but when he smiles, he takes on the demeanor of a grandmotherly old woman. Sheinbaum recalls going to Nickerson Gardens with his good friend, Maxine Waters, to witness the police break up gangs meeting to negotiate the Watts gang truce. When they arrived, the place was swarming with police.

Nickerson Gardens is a public housing apartment building located in the Watts neighborhood of LA. It's known as the birthplace of the Bounty Hunter Bloods street gang and is regularly patrolled by gangs. Sheinbaum and Waters's impulse to go there to observe the truce negotiations demonstrates an effort to understand the dynamics of the community they are policing.

Sheinbaum spent an hour talking to some of the gang members who were gathered outside. He recalls how the men looked like they wanted to kill him, since he was a police commissioner "and therefore all the things that went along with being a cop." One man looked like he'd been shot some time in the previous months or years. All the men "have been through the wars down there." Sheinbaum recalls talking with the men and gaining insight into their circumstances.

The tension Sheinbaum identifies between himself and the gang members reaffirms the us vs. them dynamic introduced in the book's prologue. There's a clearly defined rivalry between law enforcement and the gangs, which comprise men and boys who turned to gang activity to find the stability and protection that law enforcement denies their community.

The police were mad Sheinbaum talked to the gang members, however. He recalls receiving a letter shortly after, accusing him of having "talked to our enemy." He responded by heading down to seventy-seventh street and defending himself, explaining how he had taken advantage of learning about these people about whom he knows nothing—and wasn't this something the cops would want him to do?

Law enforcement's disapproval of Sheinbaum's attempts to talk with the gang members reflects law enforcement's desire to maintain the us vs. them dynamic. That dynamic draws a clear line between police and supposed criminals, with no room for nuance or attempt at understanding.

Sheinbaum contends that the abuse goes both ways: the police have abused the city, but the city has also abused the police. His main issue is his fellow police officers' response to his trying to understand the gang members. They asked him, "So which side are you on?" Sheinbaum thinks that it's a problem that there has to be a side.

Sheinbaum's criticism of being asked to take a "side" points to how counterproductive he believes it is to police a community in a way that sees every citizen as a criminal. Brute force and imprisoning gang members do little to fix the problems that made gang violence an issue in the first place.

WHEN I FINALLY GOT MY VISION/NIGHTCLOTHES

Smith interviews Michael Zinzun, a representative for the Coalition Against Police Abuse. Zinzun sits in his office, which is filled with disturbing, graphic images of victims of police abuse. One features a man with part of his skull and chest blown off. There's a Black Panther Party banner on the wall. Zinzun recalls witnessing an instance of police abuse. He had been sleeping when he heard a man cry out for help, and he and some other neighbors came out in their pajamas to investigate. They saw the police brutally beating a handcuffed Black man named Eugene Rivers across the street from the community center.

That police would continue to beat a handcuffed man despite a crowd of witnesses assembling to watch shows how comfortable law enforcement is using excessive force on minorities. It also shows how their status as police officers gives them institutional protection to commit such injustices. They don't worry about getting caught because their badge gives them authority and the backing of a powerful institution.

Zinzun and some others approached the police and begged them to stop. The police began to mace the crowd, claiming that they were "hostile." They singled Zinzun out and handcuffed him, led him to an unlit area away from the crowd, and proceeded to stomp on his back. One officer lifted him up and hit him across the head with a billy club. Another hit him across the eye with his flashlight, which resulted in permanent blindness. Afterward, he received two million dollars from the city, which he funneled into his organization.

Zinzun's account expands on Salas's and shows how widespread corruption was in the LAPD in the late 20th century. Zinzun's decision to funnel his settlement to his organization demonstrates his dedication to a broader cause. Rather than focus just on himself and on what he suffered, Zinzun tries to create something positive from the trauma he experienced—and hopefully, help others from suffering as he did.

THEY

It's a rainy Saturday afternoon in February. Jason Sanford, an actor, and Smith sit in an office at Mark Taper Forum. Sanford is a handsome white man in his late 20s. Sanford answers Smith's question of who "they" are in Santa Barbara, which is somewhat different than who "they" are in LA The main difference is that LA has a higher Black population, whereas Santa Barbara has a higher Mexican population.

As a white, economically privileged man, Sanford offers a different perspective from the accounts the play has presented thus far. The us vs them dynamic is relevant to his experiences, but he's on the opposite side of the power struggle: he is part of "us," the privileged class that society accepts, rather than the "them" (they) who society pushes to the side and denies equal treatment.

Sanford speculates that he's never been beaten by police because of how he looks. In fact, even when police have arrested him, they've made comments about how he looks like an "all-American white boy" and "responsible." They ask him why he has "so many warrants." He recalls having a discussion with a police officer about tennis as they drove together in the police car. Sanford concludes that he's had a completely different experience with the police than Black men have had.

Unlike Zinzun, for instance, Sanford has pleasant experiences with law enforcement. Not only do they refrain from beating him, but they also chat with him about shared interests, relating to him as a fellow human. Sanford's account helps illustrate how differently altercations with law enforcement go when one has the fortune of being an "all-American boy" rather than a member of a marginalized community.

BROAD DAYLIGHT

Smith interviews An anonymous young Black man who is a gang member. The man sits in his mother's fancy apartment building. He's been living with her since his recent release from jail. He remarks how the respect a lot of the gang members used to have for their elders is absent in the newer gang members. When the police accost these young men now, the old folks don't come out to protest like they used to. There was more respect in the Valley, though, where the man was surrounded by rivals.

The man's remarks about the lack of respect in younger generations of gang members and diminished care from elders reflects a broader sense of despair and helplessness among communities where gang activity combined with violent policing put the area in a constant state of instability and crisis.

The man remembers how he and his brother used to call themselves the Blues Brothers, after the blue rags they wore on their heads. They walk through the Bloods' neighborhoods, casually calling to them, "What's up cuz?" The Bloods normally wouldn't bother them, because they knew the man carried a gun. Some would comment back, remarking, "well, he ain't fixin' ta shoot me in this broad daylight." When this happened, the man would shoot at them. The man's actions garnered him a reputation.

The man's ruthlessness and comfort with shooting others illustrates his desperation. It also shows how the will to survive encourages young people to turn to violence, crime, and gang affiliation. The man gains a reputation because doing so helps him survive; he's not committing violence for the sake of violence alone.

Smith changes the topic, asking the man about his favorite song. He tells her he likes oldies, and his favorite song is "Am I Dreamin'?" by Atlantic Star.

The romantic lyrics of the Atlantic Star song clash with the tough picture the man just painted of himself. This complicates the audience image of him, humanizing him. The reasons people turn to crime are complex, systemic, and varied—and the people who turn to crime are, in fact, people.

SURFER'S DESERT

Smith interviews Mike Davis, an LA-based writer and urban critic of Irish descent, at a restaurant in the Biltmore Hotel in downtown Los Angeles. Davis remarks how the world needs a new civil rights movement "like we need sunshine, and […] fresh air." He praises the gang truce that has just taken place in the city, seeing it as a "sign of / a generation that won't commit suicide." However, the East Side is engaged in "the worst Latino gang / war in history." Just last weekend, 17 Latino kids died, many of them the children of recent immigrants who wouldn't otherwise be involved in gang **violence**.

Davis's observation that Los Angeles needs a new civil rights movement suggests that the civil rights movement of the 1960s failed to make good on the promises of equality it set out to accomplish. The current state of Los Angeles, which is suffering from heightened racial tensions and a corrupt police force, is evidence of those unfulfilled promises.

And yet, nobody is publicly decrying the **violence** as an emergency. Davis observes how "this city is at war with / its own children," who it fails to confront and talk to about the violence. Davis compares the current situation with gang-affiliated youth to his own white childhood growing up in Southern California. His parents hitchhiked to California from Ohio. Davis grew up among "Okies" and Dust Bowl refugees, everyone received a free junior college education, and employment was plentiful. Kids could go to the beach and race their cars. He describes the civil rights movement as a struggle to secure those privileges for everyone.

Davis's observation that LA "is at war with / its own children" conveys the way the system has turned its back on children growing up in high-violence, gang-affiliated areas and allowed them to turn to lives of crime themselves. The city will later punish these children for engaging in crimes it could well have prevented, had it done what it did for "Okies" years ago. "Okies" refers to migrant agricultural workers who traveled to California during the westward mass migration during the Great Depression in the 1930s. Many of these people were from Oklahoma, hence the term "Okie," which is derogatory. Davis brings up these classes of people from history to show how underprivileged classes of white people have historically been given more assistance than their Black counterparts.

Davis notes how now, even white kids are losing these privileges, since the only permitted activity is mall shopping. Helicopters patrol the beaches, and cruising is said to "lead[] to gang warfare." These days, people go out to the desert to live in armed compounds and "tear up the Joshua trees," instead of to find peace and freedom in the desert.

Davis situates Los Angeles's current state within a broader culture of despair. He sees that young people no longer have hopes or idealized visions of the future. Now, they just want to "tear up the Joshua trees" and feed their despair. Davis's remarks also show how oppression and violence in one community doesn't stay contained to that community—it spreads outward, affecting even the most privileged people. This is why, he suggests, it's important for everyone to care about oppression: it may one day affect someone who thought it didn't matter to them.

LIGHTNING BUT NO RAIN

Smith interviews Theresa Allison, founder of Mothers Reclaiming Our Children (Mothers ROC), and the mother of gang truce architect Dewayne Holmes. Alison talks about the origins of Mothers ROC, which began on November 29, 1991, after her nephew died and her son, Dewayne, thought about bringing peace to "the guys in the project" (Allison stresses that she doesn't want to say "gangs"). Inspired by the gang members who began to meet every Sunday to establish the gang truce, Allison established her own advocacy group for mothers whose kids were arrested by the LAPD on false or exaggerated charges.

On the one hand, the formation of Mothers ROC emphasizes the potential for community involvement and shared experience to promote healing and progress. On the other hand, that Allison and these other mothers must advocate for themselves rather than turning to law enforcement to help reflects that society has failed its marginalized communities. For Allison and these other mothers, the police are the perpetrators, not trustworthy public servants.

One day, Dewayne was sentenced for a crime he didn't commit. Then, Allison's nephew, Tiny, was killed by police officers driving unmarked cars and dressed in gang clothing, in what was meant to look like a drive-by shooting. Allison explains that this is a common tactic that the police use: they kill a Black man, then blame it on an enemy gang. On the night of his death, Tiny was outside, gathering up children to protect them from the shooting that goes on in the projects after dark.

Allison explains how officers sometimes impersonate gang members to carry out violence. They can do this because the police are sanctioned by the state, so they have the protection of a powerful institution. Tiny's death represents a role reversal of sorts, as he was killed by police while trying to serve and protect his community. The police, rather than protecting the community, ultimately harm people.

The day of Tiny's death, something felt off to Allison, like the day of Jesus's crucifixion. When she got home, her daughter ran to her crying and told her about Tiny's death. Allison, a staunch Catholic, recalls how she immediately thought of Jesus passing around "one loaf of bread and made a whole." It was then that she decided a change had to happen, since a change had already overtaken them: her son had changed, and everyone had changed "from happy people / to hurting people." But, Allison says, white people "don't want the peace, / they don't want us comin' together."

Allison's inspiration to form her grassroots organization based on Jesus passing around "one loaf of bread and ma[king] a whole" is a testament to the healing protentional of community engagement and shared experience. Fragmented communities are made up of "hurting people" but communities who can offer each other compassion and support are "happy people." Allison's belief that white people "don't want the peace" of Black communities "comin' together" seems to stem from a desire for the oppressor to maintain their power by keeping oppressed communities disadvantaged and unable to organize.

After Tiny's funeral, the police came after Dewayne. He was walking around the projects at night when the police accosted him, insisting that he was a different man named Damian Holmes. When the police escorted Dewayne to their car, Allison and some others assembled to tip it over. A young woman positioned herself beneath the back wheel. Allison told the police her son didn't have a warrant, but the police insisted that he did—and the officer said they'd have to take him to the station to run his name through the system to check, anyway. Allison states that she knew then that the police knew perfectly well who her son was and intended to kill him.

Allison's story about the police officers' dishonest way of trying to apprehend her son shows the extent of corruption in the LAPD at the time. They overstep their authority to keep communities like Allison's under their control. Allison's fear that the police planned to kill her son shows how corrupted and broken the relationship is between the police and the communities they are supposed to protect. This stands in stark contrast to the unassuming, friendly interactions with officers Jason Sanford described earlier in the act.

Although the sergeant made the other officers apologize for their mistake, after that night, the police remained determined to capture and arrest Dewayne. Allison explains that the police had a vendetta against her son because they didn't want everyone to come together and protest against the police. After all, the LA police department is supposed to be the best in the world, and it would be a scandal for the world to see them for the corrupt force they are beneath this facade.

The forced apology was nothing more than a symbolic gesture—a formality to pretend the police were operating legitimately. Their continued search for Dewayne shows that the police had made no mistake in misidentifying Dewayne: their mistaken identity was a calculated attempt to press charges against an innocent person. Their only mistake was in getting caught.

Allison describes the LAPD's corrupt practice of taking a kid from one project, dropping him in another, and leaving him to be killed by an enemy gang. They picked up Dewayne multiple times, beginning when he was just a little boy. Allison remembers the woman who shot Tiny in the face. She thinks about how the police officers take kids as young as 12, knock their heads against trees, throw them to the ground, and stomp on them. Allison demands to know why the police couldn't just handcuff the kids and take them to jail.

The behavior of the LAPD that Allison describes goes beyond a tough-on-crime approach to police work. Allison isn't demanding that Black people be let off the hook for any illegal acts they've committed. Instead, she simply requests that they be treated as humans who have committed a crime, not animals for the police to subdue and cause to suffer unnecessarily.

Allison thinks the police shot Tiny in the face "to keep him from say'in what they said to him," to cover for themselves. She says the police aren't strong enough to say they messed up and killed the wrong person. She laments how wrong it is that the police have power and a system that works for them: once the police remove their uniforms, they're just people and are no different than anyone else. Allison cries as she relates how the police took Dewayne one night while she was away receiving care for her heart problems.

Allison's observation that the police are like anyone else shows how all the police officers' power comes from the protections they gain from their association with law enforcement and the government. Being part of a government organization is, she suggests, the only thing that makes them any different from the people they arrest and abuse.

A BLOODSTAINED BANNER

Cornel West, a scholar, sits at his desk. He's wearing a three-piece navy suit, a pocket watch, and eyeglasses. He is surrounded by books and papers. Smith describes West's desk as "a fortress." West explains how the goal of life is to "gain / access / to power and property / and pleasure / by any means you cayan."

West's analysis that the point of life is to "gain / access / to power and property / and pleasure / by any means you cayan" situates gang violence within the broader goal of securing power, personal property, and status. In this way, West insists that a gang member's goal is comparable to anyone else's.

West establishes two ways to gain security. First, there's the American "frontier myth," which dictates that there exists a moral imperative and reward for expanding "by means of conquest and dispossession of duh / people's land." He relates this to Richard Slotkin's description of America as a "gunfighter nation." West suggests that America's archetypal heroes, such as cowboys, use guns to "expand the fron*teer*," acquiring more land to develop, resources to mine, and subordinates to rule. West sees the gunfighter culture as a dangerous exhibition of "a dee machismo / ethic."

Richard Slotkin is a cultural critic and historian. He has done extensive research on violence within the American myth of the frontier. West contextualizes gang activity within the broader trope of American exceptionalism and westward expansion. West interprets contemporary gun culture as an example of a "machismo" ethic. "Machismo" refers to an aggressive, masculine pride. It's this masculine pride that fuels gang members (and the pioneers before them) to engage in violence and war to protect and expand their claim to the land, and to ensure their hold on power. Yet, America has sanctified the pioneer myth and failed to see gang warfare as just another iteration of the same idea.

West cites the popularity of Rambo and gangster rap as evidence of the culture's fixation on a machismo identity. He posits that gangster rap's machismo creates an alternate narrative where marginalized Black men can band together to "outpolice" and "outbrutalize" the police. However, one consequence of this is that once Black men become the "police agents," "the interests of black *women* / are subordinated." While West contends that it takes bravery to defy the dominant authority, he still sees this rebellion as existing "within a patriarchal mode." It ends up recycling the same types of oppression and struggle.

West posits that the machismo impulse of American culture encourages a culture of oppression even among oppressed communities. West's formulation shows how oppression inspires oppression, further dividing communities. While Black resistance to oppression is an attempt to regain agency lost to over-policing and racism, this resistance gains power in the same, unjust way as the system it tried to overcome. Both the police and Black "police agents, after all, subjugate another group (Black people as a whole and Black women, respectively). This is an example of how justice is ambiguous and complex, as it often causes one group to suffer so another group can achieve justice.

As a result, the best Black people can do "is hold up / a bloodstained banner / of a black struggle." While a power struggle is necessary for change, West thinks it's also important not to become amoral and give up on striving for "the broader possibilities of human / beings engaging in interaction that accents our humanness," rather than constructed identities, such as gender or race. At this time, the best anyone can do, West argues, is identify and reproduce the best qualities of the past.

West's image of "a bloodstained banner / of a black struggle" is a cynical metaphor for the historical pattern of Black rights movements to rarely enacting real change and improve the circumstances for Black people. At the same time, he cautions Black people not to become too consumed by past failures that they disregard "the broader possibilities of human / beings engaging in interaction" as a collective whole. While West is pragmatic about the limited ability of revolutionary movements to create real change, he contends that without an inner idealism and sense of hope, enacting change is all but impossible.

West describes how the Black Panther Party expanded on Malcom X's "boldness and defiance." While X's movement was rooted in machismo, it also captured what West describes as "a certain internationalism," in that it acknowledged the roles played by people of color, progressive white people, and people who identify with the poor, working class. With all Huey Newton and Bobby Seale's bad ideas, people often forget that they possessed this broader, internationalist perspective, West notes.

The "certain internationalism" West attributes to the Black Panther Party recalls West's earlier remark about the possibility of humans engaging in their shared "humanness." That is, he suggests the party brought people together from all walks of life in pursuit of a shared goal. He seems to identify that a collective consciousness—a feeling of unity and interconnectedness—is essential to revolutionary groups determined to create social change.

Once the Black Panther Party was dissolved, West explains, conservative forces, primarily corporate elites, swept in and "reshape[d] society" to suit their interests. And this is the cultural climate America has been dealing with for the past two decades.

West considers the Black community's condition in the aftermath of the 1992 riots within the broader context of the conservative takeover of the 1980s, with Reagan Era policies "reshap[ing] society" to suit the interests of the corporate elite, often at the expense of marginalized communities.

CARMEN

Smith interviews Angela King, Rodney King's aunt. They're sitting in the back of Angela King's boutique in Pasadena. King, "a powerful looking woman with a direct gaze," smokes a cigarette as she speaks to Deavere Smith. King compares her life to the Dorothy Daindridge film *Carmen*, which is about a sex worker who meets a man in the Air Force, and his conservative lifestyle clashes with her wildness. King describes her father as conservative like the man in the Air Force. Once, King's mother drank too much at the NCO club and stabbed her father. The incident sent her mother to jail.

Angela King's brief description of her seemingly tumultuous childhood provides the reader with context about what Rodney King's childhood years might have been like. King's insight into her nephew as a child offers a personal look into a man whose identity, in the public realm, has been completely overtaken by his attack, trial, and the ensuing riots.

After King's mother's imprisonment, her family split up. Only King and her brother—Rodney's father— stayed together. She remembers fishing along the Sacramento River with Rodney and some others. Once, when Rodney was 16 or 17, she saw him catch a big trout with his bare hands. Angela told Rodney he might have some "wild African[]" in him. She still hasn't seen anyone else fish with their hands. Rodney had explained, "I ain't got time to wait," which makes Angela consider him "greedy."

Angela King's anecdote about Rodney King catching a fish portrays the young man as possessing a zeal for life, a little drive to grab at opportunities with his bare hands. This image of a young person with agency, drive, and a youthful impatience further humanizes Rodney King. That a person close to him conveys these details contributes additional poignance to the scene.

Angela transitions to talking about Rodney's assault. She recalls how he had to go to three plastic surgeons to look like himself again. When Angela heard about the assault, she turned on the TV and saw Rodney's car, and then Rodney. She remembers thinking he looked just like his father. Angela begins to cry as she remembers Rodney in the immediate aftermath of his assault; he could barely speak and looked "like hell."

Angela King's abrupt shift from remembering Rodney as a child to an account of his attack by police officers underscores the dehumanizing characteristic of the attack. The boy she just described catching fish in the river is now an adult man, who's been beaten to look "like hell." This, combined with Angela's sudden tears, creates an emotional resonance that emphasizes the sheer brutality of the police's attack.

Angela explains how, as children, they weren't raised to think about Black and white—they had all kinds of friends, of all races and ethnicities. For this reason, it's difficult to understand why Rodney's assault happened to them. She remembers how the media came to talk to her after Rodney's mother, Odessa, refused to talk to them. While Odessa didn't want to get involved in politics, Angela was determined to seek justice for Rodney and put the real story out there. She admonishes the audacity of the officer who showed no remorse throughout the entire trial.

Despite Angela, Rodney, and the rest of their family not being raised to consider race to be relevant to their identities or relationships with others, none of this matters if the institutions in power—in this case, a corrupt police department—decide that race is relevant. Angela's response to Rodney's attack mirrors Zinzun's response to his own experience with police brutality. Both repurpose their anguish to aid in the fight for justice.

Angela remembers telling Rodney how the police were determined to present him in a negative light, determined to discredit him after the videotape of his assault had publicly embarrassed them. They even bugged his car, attaching a small device the size of a screw to the bumper to monitor him. She admits to using profanity when people call her to find out information about Rodney. She wants to be calm. But it's impossible to "talk comfortable" in her situation.

A man named George Holliday recorded King's beating on video and forwarded it to a local news station, resulting in widespread condemnation of what many saw as police officers' excessive use of force. Angela King's inability to "talk comfortable" and be calm in the aftermath of her nephew's arrest, attack, and public defamation highlights her inability to escape systems of oppression.

WHERE THE WATER IS

Smith interviews Sergeant Charles Duke of the Special Weapons and Tactics Unit. Duke served as LAPD's use-of-force expert and as a witness for the defense in the Simi Valley and Federal trials. Now, Duke stands, uniformed and holding a baton, to explain how Powell's incorrect grasp on the baton is what caused him to administer 56 blows to Rodney King. In fact, hours before he beat King, the sergeant held Powell after baton training to criticize his "weak and inefficient" baton usage. Duke muses how Powell should have been taken out of the field that night.

Duke's suggestion that Powell's incorrect grasp on his baton necessitated administering over four dozen blows is an almost laughably thin excuse—Angela King just described how seriously injured Rodney King was after the beating, so calling Powell's baton skills "weak and inefficient" seems a stretch.

Next, Duke explains how the LAPD were prohibited from using upper-body-control holds in 1982, after a report showed that this type of hold led to between 17 and 20 deaths over the preceding decade, primarily of Black people. If police had been able to use an upper-body-control hold on King, the incident would have lasted 15 seconds, tops. Duke complains about "the so-called community leaders" who "started a hysteria" about upper-body-control holds, claiming that it was "inhumane." This resulted in upper-body-control holds being elevated in status from an intermediate use of force (which is what a baton is) to deadly force. Duke tells Smith that in all but one of the situations in which upper-body-control holds resulted in death, the victim had high levels of PCP and cocaine in their system. Therefore, Duke argues, it's the drugs that caused the deaths—not officers' use of force.

Duke inadvertently reveals that police brutality is common practice when the LAPD apprehends Black people. Duke's final admission is perhaps the most callous: he insinuates that the deaths of Black people placed in upper-body-control-holds weren't the fault of the restraining officers, but were the fault of the deceased victims, whose drug intoxication was the real cause of their deaths. Blaming the victims for their own deaths absolves the officers involved of any responsibility.

Duke recalls how Gilbert Lindsay, "a really neat man," saw a demonstration of baton usage and stated, "you're not gonna beat my people with that baton," insisting that police use a chokehold instead. Others disagreed, saying they'd prefer broken bones to being choked. Eventually, the political atmosphere led to the elimination of upper-body-control holds.

Gilbert Lindsay was Los Angeles's first Black City Council member. Duke invokes Lindsay, a Black man, to add more credibility to his defense that it was the system that banned chokeholds that was to blame for Rodney King's injuries, not Powell, who administered the baton beating. Duke's logic seems to be that the extremity of King's beating could have been avoided had Powell been authorized to subdue him using a chokehold. Again, Duke's argument is a weak attempt to claim that King's beating was an unfortunate side effect of bureaucratic red tape rather than a brutal attack.

Although Duke can't prove it, he suspects that Daryl Gates encouraged baton beatings similar to what occurred in the Rodney King incident to get back at the City Council and the Police Commission for taking away officers' right to use chokeholds. He remembers how a sudden onslaught of use-of-force reports that were nearly identical to the King incident came through his office after the ban on chokeholds. When Duke expressed his concerns that officers would be arrested if they didn't establish an alternative use of force, one of his superiors told him, "We're gonna beat people into submission / and we're gonna break bones." After this, Duke didn't voice concerns about baton usage again.

Here, Duke suggests that Daryl Gates authorized and encouraged officers to engage in excessive baton beatings like King's to invite lawsuits and exact revenge on the City Council and Police Commission for banning chokeholds. In other words, the LAPD police chief ordered officers to brutalize Black bodies to settle a bureaucratic dispute. This further dehumanizes Black people—they're framed as reasonable sacrifices to help Gates make his point.

INDELIBLE SUBSTANCE

Smith interviews Josie Morales, a clerk-typist and uncalled witness in Rodney King's first trial, which was held in Simi Valley. At the time of the Rodney King beating, Morales lived in Apartment A6, next door to George Holliday, the man who recorded the incident. She remembers watching as around a dozen officers surrounded King, hitting him with sticks and kicking him. Morales's husband tried to get her to go inside, but she insisted and staying and watching, because what the officers were doing was wrong and there needed to be witnesses. Morales was scheduled to testify and was disappointed when she wasn't called, since she had a lot to say about the incident.

Due to publicity generated by Holliday's video recording, King's trial was moved to Simi Valley in neighboring Ventura County. Morales's insistence on watching King's beating fulfills practical and ethical purposes. On the practical side, she could be called to court as a witness and needs to be prepared. From an ethical perspective, Morales believes she has a moral obligation to bear witness to the injustice of King's assault. Essentially, Morales watches King's beating because she believes it will validate his experience and avoid dehumanizing him further.

During the trial, Morales kept in touch with Terry White, the prosecutor, who told her he'd call her when he needed her to testify. However, White eventually informed Morales that he no longer needed her, since her account contradicted that of Melanie Singer, another witness. Afterward, Morales sent White a letter to warn him that if he didn't call residents to testify, the officers would be acquitted. Morales believes White firmly believed Holliday's video would be enough to convict the officers.

It's unclear how the other witness's account contradicted Morales's, or why Morales's account was deemed the weaker testimony. After the jury announced their verdicts, prosecution posited that the defense's strategy of presenting the jury with continuous exposure to the video desensitized jurors to the violence and adversely affected their decision. Whatever the case, no officers were convicted of assault or excessive use-of-force.

Morales remembers telling a coworker about a dream she had where the officers were acquitted. The coworker told her not to worry—there was no way the men wouldn't be convicted. She describes dreams as "made of some kind of indelible substance" as she considers how the events of her dream "came to pass."

Morales's observation about dreams being "made of some kind of indelible substance" reflects her guilt for how her absence may have contributed to the jury's failure to convict the officers. She feels obligated to advocate on King's behalf as a fellow person and witness to his traumatic attack. The term "indelible" refers to something that cannot be removed or destroyed. For Morales to describe her dream that came true as "indelible" reflects her remorse and regret at the way her absence from the trial led to the not guilty verdicts, which, in turn, incited the deadly riots.

YOUR HEADS IN SHAME

Smith interviews an anonymous male juror in the Simi Valley trial. They're sitting in the man's quiet, dimly-lit house. The man is soft-spoken. He remembers how there were plainclothes policemen everywhere once the jurors returned to the courtroom to announce their verdict. The juror knew people would be upset by the verdict, but he never could have predicted the chaos that would ensue. Had he known what his role in the not-guilty verdict would put his family through, he might have told the judge he could no longer participate in the trial. The juror begins to cry.

The Simi Valley trial was King's first trial. It was located in Ventura County, adjacent to Los Angeles. None of the 12 jurors was Black. Smith presents the juror in a sympathetic light. The audience's instinct might be to judge the man for delivering a not guilty verdict, but the man's soft-spoken demeanor and the suffering he has endured in the aftermath of the trial lends him an air of sympathy.

The juror recalls how the police escorted them to the bus, telling them not to worry about any rocks and bottles people might throw at them, since the bus's glass windows were bulletproof. When the jurors arrived at their hotel, reporters hounded them for interviews. One reporter asked, "Why are you hiding your heads in shame?" When the juror arrived home after the trial, the same "obnoxious reporter" was there, trying to speak to the juror's wife. The juror slammed the door in the reporter's face. He recalls how the reporter moved down the block but proceeded to film his house. He remembers watching on TV as Mayor Bradley and President Bush condemned the jurors' verdict. He felt as though he and the other jurors had been set up and compares the jurors to "pawns that were thrown away by the system."

The harassment the juror received after the trial presents an interesting distinction between the individual and the system. The reporter's demand to know "why [the jurors] are hiding [their] heads in shame" assumes the jurors are personally responsible for the verdict, yet this juror implies that the jurors are being scapegoated. The reporter's accusations attribute all responsibility to the individual jurors and none to the legal system's quirks, for instance. This is what the juror alludes to when he claims that he and the other jurors were "pawns that were thrown away by the system."

The juror remembers how, after reading their verdicts to the court, the judge had "a look of disdain on his face." Additionally, even though the judge had the right to withhold the jurors' names to protect them from facing harassment and threats, he failed to do so. As a result, the juror received numerous threatening letters and phone calls, and newspapers published some of the jurors' addresses. The juror reveals that more disturbing than these threats was when the KKK sent the jurors a letter expressing their support and inviting them to join their group. "And we all just were: / No, oh! / God!" says the juror.

Similarly, the judge's "look of disdain" blames the jurors who were, to the juror's mind, only making informed decisions in accordance with the judicial process. Many jurors were appalled at having to render a verdict they found legally just but morally abhorrent. The juror further emphasizes the disconnect between his morality and legal obligation by voicing his disgust at being solicited by the KKK after the trial.

MAGIC

In the spring of 1993, Smith interviews Gil Garcetti, who came into office as district attorney for Los Angeles in 1992. He replaced Ira Reiner, who had been in office during the riots. Garcetti is a handsome, physically fit man with prematurely white hair. He's energetic and friendly. The head of public relations, Suzanne Childs, sits in on the interview. Garcetti describes how, contrary to popular opinion, jurors take their civic duty very seriously. Most criminal cases require a high level of proof. As a result, most serious jurors find that the prosecution fails to deliver the required evidence to deliver a guilty verdict. At the end of the day, Garcetti explains, most people trust the police and believe they are there to serve and protect the public. Most jurors haven't had negative interactions with the police, and if they had, it's generally something minor, such as a traffic ticket.

Garcetti's monologue expands on the ideas the anonymous juror put forth in the previous scene. Garcetti seems to imply that the judicial system left the jurors with no choice but to render a not guilty verdict. For starters, criminal cases require a high burden of proof, which places the defense in a favorable position and means the prosecution has to work harder to persuade the jury. Furthermore, as law-abiding, majority white citizens, Garcetti suggests that the jurors would be predisposed to think that police officers are trustworthy, reliable court witnesses.

Because the broader culture makes people trust police officers, when an officer says something on the witness stand, "there is something magic / that comes over that individual." If an officer comes in with guns strapped to his jacket, they're less likely to win over the jury. However, if they come in dressed professionally and act politely, they convey to the jury that they are trustworthy and there to protect them. And people want to believe that the police officers are there to protect them, Garcetti notes, because people today "liv[e] / in a state of fear." While the credibility of police is not quite as stable as it used to be, by and large, most people want to believe that the police are there to help them.

Garcetti describes the process by which jurors are compelled to trust police officers as "something magic / that comes over that individual." There's nothing magical going on in the Simi Valley trial. However, Garcetti implies that the jurors (who were all white) trust and empathize with white police officers more than they do with Black victims like Rodney King. Essentially, he implies that because white jurors want to maintain their idealized vision of who and what the police are, they deliver a not guilty verdict.

HAMMER

Smith interviews Stanley K. Sheinbaum in his Brentwood home. Sheinbaum recalls how he heard about the verdict on the radio as he was driving into downtown LA. He speaks of a "mini-experience" he had that afternoon that enabled him to predict the chaos that would envelop LA after the verdicts were announced. As he was driving down the Santa Monica Freeway, he saw an African American man and an African American woman driving a newer model BMW. The window was down, and he saw that the woman had a hammer in her hand.

Stanley K. Sheinbaum makes a second appearance—he and Maxine Waters are the only subjects to appear in more than one scene. The surreal "mini-experience" he recalls in his testimony creates suspense and an ominous atmosphere to usher in Act Three: War Zone. One remarkable aspect of the play is how Smith builds suspense and tension like this, despite depriving the audience of conventional plot. The image of the BMW—a luxury vehicle—clashes with the image of a woman holding a hammer. Sheinbaum seems to interpret these disjointed images as signs of the chaos and disarray that would soon envelop the city.

When Sheinbaum returned to the garage of the police department around 6:30, he ran into Daryl Gates, who was on his way out to attend a fundraiser to campaign against Prop. F, a measure that sought to limit a police chief's term to five years and which allowed for only one term renewal. The old charter didn't include term limits.

As police chief, Gates would have had incentive to attend a fundraiser to defeat a measure that would negatively affect his career. Symbolically, his decision to leave his post to attend the Prop F fundraiser reflects Gates's prioritization of politics and ego over public service.

Sheinbaum recalls then entering the police department and hearing screams from down the hall. "They're coming in!" one woman screamed. He remembers seeing a rock crash through the paned glass walls at the front of the police department.

With the conclusion of Sheinbaum's account, the play shifts focus from retrospective analyses of the riots to the riots themselves. The rock crashing through here foreshadows the intense violence to come.

RIOT

Smith interviews Chung Lee, President of the Korean American Victims Association. They sit in a conference room in an office in Koreatown. Lee is in his 60s. His son is there to translate for him. Deavere Smith includes a phonetic transcription of Lee's responses, as well as the translations his son provided. Lee recalls how his neighbor called to say that Lee's store had been looted and all their stock was scattered across the street. It was then that Lee decided to "give up / any sense of attachment to our possessions." Later, the same neighbor called to tell Lee his store was on fire.

Lee's account is unique in its straightforwardness: he is practically emotionless as he describes deciding to "give up / any sense of attachment to [his] possessions." Lee's resignation might come from a deeper frustration with the erasure of Korean victims of the riots, which were largely absent from media depictions. Korean American businesses, which were prevalent in the majority-Black neighborhood where the riots occurred, were disproportionately targeted, looted, and burned. Beginning Act Three from Lee's perspective suggests an effort to give voice to the Korean American victims who historically have remained at the periphery of analyses of the 1992 riots.

MESSAGES

Smith interviews Tom Bradley, the former mayor of Los Angeles. They sit in his City Hall office. A woman from the public relations department sits in on the interview. Bradley sits in an armchair, his long legs outstretched. He remembers how he and his department had drafted statements to release to the press in advance of the Rodney King trial verdicts. They drafted different messages for a guilty verdict, a partial verdict, and verdict of acquittal on all counts, though Bradley drafted the latter as "a precautionary measure," doubting acquittal would happen.

Bradley's recollection about how caught off-guard his department was by the jury's not guilty verdicts provides additional context for the atmosphere of the city on the eve of the riots. Most people were certain that the jury would reach a guilty verdict, or, at least, that the involved officers would be held responsible for their abuse of power in one way or another.

When they received news of the acquittal, Bradley addressed the public directly to express his outrage. However, he urged people not to erase the progress society had made by responding to the injustice with **violence**—even if the jury's verdict was "completely / disconnected with the TV shots that you saw."

Bradley recognizes the disingenuousness of telling people not to respond radically to what the majority believed was a radical miscarriage of justice. His remark about the jury's verdict being "completely / disconnected with the TV shots that [the public] saw" reaffirms the ideas presented in the anonymous juror's monologue: that the judicial system can be "completely disconnected" from a moral understanding of right and wrong.

DON'T SHOOT

Smith interviews Richard Kim, an appliance store owner. Kim is a Korean American man in his 30s. He and Smith sit in a room at the back of his electronics store, which is filled with expensive electronics. Kim recalls how his father and their neighbor arrived to tell him what happened and then returned to the store. There were no police officers in sight. Kim, his father, and his neighbor called hospitals and police stations to see if anyone checked in who fit his mother's description, but nobody could give them any information.

Kim's anxious quest to find his mother builds tension and compels the audience to empathize with his experience of fear and chaos. Like Chung Lee, whose monologue opened Act Three: War Zone, Richard Kim is a Korean business owner whose store was targeted by rioters. However, Kim presents a slightly different perspective, as he seems far more attached to his possessions and concerned for other people than Lee was.

Meanwhile, Kim recalls, another neighbor called to tell them that people were looting Kim's family's store. Kim, his father, and their neighbor piled into a van and drove to the store. He knew people were carrying guns, and he knew his mother had been shot on the street corner. By the time the men arrived, hundreds of people were in the store. Their neighbor, who owned a car dealership, was trying to secure his property. People were carrying guns and shooting at each other.

Kim's monologue places the audience directly in the action of the riots. The scene almost brings to life the hyperviolent, machismo impulse Cornell West described earlier in "A Bloodstained Banner." But rather than the violence being cathartic, Kim, his father, and the neighbor seem afraid.

Kim drove the van to the front of their store. A man was firing at Kim. Kim emerged from the van, thinking he could use it as a shield, and then cried out for people to stop shooting. For a moment, they did. Then, three people across the street aimed their guns at Kim, who ducked just before they shot at him. Kim hurriedly returned to the van and loaded a rifle. He tells Smith that he never intended to hurt anyone—he only wanted to disperse the crowd—when he fired into the general direction of gunfire. He recalls how the people did disperse, all of them going "pa-chew."

Kim's recollection of the riots serves a different purpose than many of the other accounts Smith presents, which frame the riots within a historical or a more academic context to condemn or justify them. Instead, Kim presents an unfiltered account of the violence and chaos the riots wrought on residents and business owners of South-Central.

BUTTA BOOM

Smith interviews Joe Viola, a television writer. Viola recounts where he was when the riots first began. He had just mailed his daughter's registration forms to Berkeley and was standing at a street corner when the first cars arrived. A kid holding a gun pointed a weapon in Viola's direction and said, "You're dead, motherfucker," or something to that effect. These events happened "Right *here*, right on the corner!" Viola specifies to Smith. Viola was too terrified to move. He heard screams, though he couldn't see what was happening.

Witnessing a car drive by with a gun-wielding kid hanging out the window isn't an image that tracks in Viola's privileged life. That he sees this terrifying image immediately after completing the normal task of dropping off outgoing mail emphasizes how significantly the riots disrupted and injected unrest into the otherwise content lives of LA's privileged classes. Suddenly, gang violence that had been restricted to faraway neighborhoods has encroached on Viola's world. Viola's incredulity that such violence could spread to his world comes through in his exclamation that all the events of his story occurred "right here, *right on the corner!"*

A week later, Viola read a newspaper article that clarified some of the details he couldn't discern about the terrifying scene in the moment. Two cars filled with teenage girls pulling up to a curb outside the Jewish Federation. The girls emerged carrying a two-by-four and used it to hit a man in the head. The man fell to the ground, and people pleaded with the girls to stop. When a bystander tried to help the beaten man, a kid in one of the cars yelled, "shoot 'em," prompting another kid to shoot the girl in the leg. Viola remembers that one of the cars pulled up to him afterward, prompting him to run back to his house, lock the doors, and protect his wife and kids.

Viola's energetic retelling of the presumed gang violence he witnessed in his neighborhood that day emphasizes the surreal aspect of the experience. He seems as though he can't quite believe what he saw, which is why he relies on details gleaned from the newspaper article that was released afterward to supplement his retelling of the story.

WAR ZONE

Smith interviews Judith Tur, a ground reporter for LA News Service. They're sitting in the Santa Monica Airport. Tur is a petite, attractive woman in her 50s. She shows Smith the video of the Reginald Denny beating that John and Marika Tur filmed from their helicopter. The video depicts a man being beaten by a group of men during the 1992 Los Angeles riots. Tur calls the men "clowns." In the video, women nearby are taking photos of the attack. People pass by and don't help the fallen man. Finally, a Black man who Tur thinks is named Larry Tarvo approaches and helps the man.

After Rodney King, Reginald Denny was the most well-known figure associated with the riots. His racially motivated attack by four Black men (later nicknamed the LA 4) made headlines in an effort to discredit the riots and vilify the rioters. Judith's resentment of the rioters seems more personal than other accounts Smith has presented thus far. She adopts an incensed tone and is quick to resort to name-calling, deeming Denny's attackers "clowns," for instance.

Reginald Denny enters the frame now. Tur gets angry as the video plays. She calls points out a passerby who videotapes Denny's assault without stopping to help, calling the man an "animal" who "don't deserve / to live." She continues her tirade, claiming that "this is not [her] United States anymore." A man shoots at Denny, but he misses. The footage disgusts Tur, who claims she's no better than anyone else and that "people are people. / Black, white, green, or purple." However, Tur claims, the rioters are "taking advantage" of the situation and ought to "go out and work for a living," since everyone has had hardships in life. Tur suggests they take her experience as an example: she left her husband, who was addicted to gambling, at 42 and worked in a market as a cashier, earning minimum wage. She would never have dreamed of going on welfare or stealing to make ends meet.

Tur displays visceral hatred for the rioters. Referring to (Black) rioters as "animal[s]" who "don't deserve / to live" is dehumanizing. Tur's assertion that "this is not [her] United States anymore" reflects her position of privilege. Tur's outrage disregards the violence and injustice that had impacted marginalized communities long before she deemed the U.S. to no longer reflect her personal values. This implies that Tur was fine with "her" America allowing certain races and classes of people to suffer injustices. It's not the violence and collapse of social order that angers Tur—it's that the violence and social order is starting to impact people who are white, like she is. Tur claims not to be racist, insisting that "people are people," regardless of skin color. Yet she's incredibly quick to make derogatory, stereotypical comments about the predominantly Black rioters who are "taking advantage" of the verdict and ought to "go out and work for a living." Tur evokes the idea that every person has an equal chance in life, and that just because she made it through a divorce in one piece, every other person in the world should be capable of overcoming adversity, too. Tur's logic blatantly ignores the underlying structural forces that make it more difficult for Black people to receive equal treatment in LA, and in America more broadly.

Tur explains that while she used to hate guns, she doesn't anymore. And if anyone threatens her life, she'll shoot them without hesitation. She says she and other white people are angry that "they're going back fifty years instead of being pushed ahead."

Tur's claim that "[white people are] going back fifty years instead of being pushed ahead" overtly reveals her belief that white people have the right to succeed and be "pushed ahead" in society at the expense of Black people and other minorities. The reason the riots upset her is because they have inverted Tur's preferred social order, putting Black people in a position to seek justice at the expense of white suffering.

BUBBLE GUM MACHINE MAN

Smith interviews Allen Cooper, a.k.a. Big Al, an ex-gang member, ex-con, and current activist for the national truce movement. Cooper talks about the crimes of assault and battery the LA Four were accused of committing. He asks the LA Four's accusers a series of questions: "What did the government dig for? […] / Stoppin' traffic of a truck? Are they sure that truck belonged in that area?" Cooper thinks it was an "intimidation move" for Reginald Denny to drive into an area in the midst of an uprising: he might have been "tryin' to prove he can get / past," and any sensible person would have gone around another way.

Cooper's thoughts on Denny contrast sharply with Tur's: unlike Tur, Cooper thinks Denny isn't an entirely innocent victim and should have had the common sense not to drive a semi-truck into a riot. Cooper goes a step further, suggesting that Denny's decision to drive through the riots was an "intimidation move" intended to put Black rioters in their place and coerce them into submission. He may have ended as a victim, but he started as an aggressor.

Cooper states that nobody is "basin' [their] life on Reginald Denny" or "on Rodney King." These beatings only show how Black people get treated in their own communities. He accuses the law of handling King's beating unjustly, and "like a soap opera." Besides, law enforcement have been beating people for years. King is not an unusual case, it's just that the video recording showed the world the extent of police brutality. Cooper also predicts that had a police officer been beaten, it would have resulted in national riots.

Cooper's stance on the Denny and King beatings—both of which were recorded on video and met with widespread outrage when they were broadcast to the public—derives from his personal experience with police oppression. As a Black man, he doesn't see King's beating as a spectacle because he knows that the police treat Black people this way on a daily basis. Cooper insinuates it's not in the best interest of justice for the news media to sensationalize King's beating "like a soap opera" because it gives ignorant viewers the impression that King's beating is an anomaly, when, in fact, such incidents are commonplace in marginalized communities.

Cooper sees injustice as larger than Rodney King. "it's the ghetto," he explains. As an example, he describes going to a swap meet and seeing a bubble gum machine man with a pistol. Cooper thought it was crazy to think anyone would want to rob a bubble gum machine man. Yet, the "ghetto's" dangerous conditions require the bubble gum machine man to arm himself. Cooper states that a person has to live in the "ghetto" to understand what it's really like.

Cooper believes that the law, media, and public's impulse to see Rodney King as a symbol of injustice distracts from the broader problem of "the ghetto," or the larger systems that keep Black people in violent environments from which they can't escape. In Cooper's monologue, "the ghetto" becomes a metaphor for the way forces of police brutality, constant exposure to violence, and unequal treatment under the law combine to completely warp a person's sense of themselves and the world. Cooper insists that people who haven't lived in the "ghetto" can't understand how completely it alters one's sense of the world. To an outsider, it would be ridiculous to think a bubble gum machine man would need to arm himself against theft. To someone who's grown up in the "ghetto," violence is such an accepted part of daily life that a bubble gum machine man needing a pistol to defend himself is no longer surreal.

Cooper talks more about racial discrimination, noting how "Anything is never a problem 'til the black man gets his hands on it." For instance, everyone was free to have fully automatic weapons until Black people started to carry them; then it was suddenly a crime. Cooper concludes by stating that the uproar over Reginald Denny "is a joke" that distracts from "the real / problem."

Cooper identifies the double standards that society applies to white people and Black people, such as the right to possess fully automatic weapons. When Cooper describes the public outrage over Denny's beating as "a joke," he's criticizing the mainstream media's attempt to use a single instance of Black-on-white crime to discredit the ways in which the law discriminates against and harms Black people on a daily basis.

A WEIRD COMMON THREAD IN OUR LIVES

Smith interviews Reginald Denny. They're in the office of Johnnie Cochran, Denny's lawyer. Denny wears a baseball cap and T-shirt. His friend is there with a little girl. One of Cochran's assistants, a Black woman attorney, attends the interview as well. Denny is upbeat as he describes what led to his beating. Every day, he has to make a trip to Inglewood. Normally it's not a problem, other than people being annoyed by him "taking up as much space as [he] can in the truck." Turning onto Florence Street is tricky, and he needs two lanes to make the sharp turn.

Smith has presented a Denny sympathizer, a Denny critic, and now she finally offers Denny's perspective on his attack. Denny's notably upbeat demeanor is perhaps surprising, given the brutal attack he suffered. Denny's recollection of his attack contradicts Cooper's assumptions about Denny's motives. While Cooper thinks Denny turned onto Florence Street to intimidate rioters, Denny claims the turn was part of his daily route as a truck driver.

Denny describes turning onto the street and seeing the chaos of the riots as like something out of a movie. Before he could register anything, he was beaten with a bottle of oxygen his attackers had taken from the medical supply truck in front of him. Denny laughs at the irony of this detail. He remembers how he didn't even realize that the verdict had been announced, since he wasn't paying attention to the trial. At the time, he didn't think it had much relevance to his life. For this reason, he had no idea what was happening on Florence Street.

Denny's willingness to laugh at the irony of bludgeoned with a medical device intended to help, not harm, a person further displays his seeming success at making peace with his attack. Like other white or relatively privileged characters, Denny shows how his race and class status leave him fairly ignorant about the sufferings of marginalized communities. Here, he reveals that he hadn't even been paying attention to King's trial, which, until the fateful day of his attack, had no relevance to his life.

The last thing Denny remembers is his right window being smashed in. He was in a coma for days, and the doctors at the hospital wouldn't tell him about the riot until weeks after, believing that would cause him undue stress. He first understood that he was a part of something significant when important people, like Reverend Jesse Jackson and actor Arsenio Hall, started coming by to see him. If he hadn't watched news coverage of the attack, or talked to his rescuers, Titus, Bobby, Terry, and Lee, he wouldn't remember anything.

Like King's attack, Denny's was also highly publicized and sensationalized. Visits by high-profile politician, activist, and minister Rev. Jesse Jackson and actor Arsenio Hall could be interpreted as calculated displays intended to broadcast Black solidarity with the white victim of a racially targeted attack to do damage control in the aftermath of the riots. This lends some credence to Allen Cooper's earlier gripe about all the Denny publicity distracting from the real problem of widespread police brutality, as well.

Denny remembers Terry visiting him in the hospital. It was an emotional visit. Denny describes how impossible it is to express gratitude for someone who saves your life. He describes meeting his rescuers as like meeting friends and talks about the "weird common thread in [their] lives." He recalls how his rescuers saw the attack on TV and came to his aid, helping him steer the semi-truck out of the chaotic scene. There was blood everywhere. Denny remembers seeing photos of himself looking bloodied before surgery. He describes how Lee Euell, another of his rescuers, told him about how she cradled him as they made their way to the hospital.

Denny's impulse to connect and relate to others as he heals is best encapsulated in his description of the special bond he has formed with his rescuers, which he characterizes as the "weird common thread in [their] lives." In the face of great crisis, Denny has found solace in connecting with others. And note too that he sees his Black rescuers as individual people, rather than lumping them in with the Black people who beat him.

Denny describes his dream of making a room dedicated to memorializing the riot when he has a house one day. It will be "a happy room," filled with "love and compassion / and the funny notes" he received in the aftermath of his attack. There will be no "color problem" in the room. Denny admonishes the white man who thinks he's "a bad-ass / and / thinks he's better than any other race in town." He wishes he could put that man in a situation where he needs help so he could see how he'd take whatever help was offered to him, regardless of the color of the person's skin.

Denny's vision of "a happy room" expands on his newfound appreciation for connecting to others on a personal level. In fact, in this room, there is no place for any social constructs that sever this collective experience, including race. Additionally, Denny's attitude of compassion and forgiveness is particularly striking when juxtaposed with Judith Tur's hateful tirade.

A BADGE OF COURAGE

Smith interviews Captain Lane Haywood of the Compton Fire Department. He's a tall, dark-skinned, handsome man with a broad smile and upbeat demeanor. Haywood remembers how difficult it was to contain all the riot's fires with the number of men in his squad. When he and his men were up on the roof trying to extinguish the flames, people shot in their direction, though Haywood wasn't sure if the shots were directed at them specifically. He and his men got down from the roof. Later, they discovered that the shots came from the police, who fired shots in the air to ward off a group of people who assembled to protect the fashion center.

Haywood's observation of the police actively dispersing a crowd of people gathered to protect a building from looting suggests that the police were (unwittingly or purposefully) complicit in the riots' destruction of property. This challenges the reverent manner in which several white characters have spoken about police officers—or, in Garcetti's terms in "Magic," the magic that gives a police officer an instant air of credibility.

Haywood describes the rest of the scene that unfolded that day. Cars were backed up down the street, and they could hear gunshots nearby, which police ignored. Looters broke the windows of the Pep Boys store down the street—right in front of the police. Haywood remembers having never before seen such angry women, either: he describes women sitting in the beds of pickup trucks yelling, "Let the motherfuckers burn."

Again, Haywood observes police who were capable of interfering to quell the violence or curb the destruction wrought by the riots, but who actively chose to do nothing and watch chaos unfold around them. Heywood's other recollections of the riots, such as angry, swearing women in beds of pickup trucks, help paint a scene of chaos and the disintegration of social order.

Haywood remembers when a task force of firefighters arrived from Huntington Beach. They had police escorts and bulletproof vests. Haywood notes how the task force came with vests for his squad, but all the nonessential workers took them before Haywood's squad could claim them, and he was never even informed that there were vests for his men in the first place. He elaborates, explaining that his chief doesn't like the department to wear vests, since it gives the impression that Compton is a dangerous place. Instead, the chief argues that the men's badges are their vests—their "badge of courage." Haywood disagrees, noting that courage doesn't matter once a person hears gunfire. All they can think about then is the responsibility they have to return home safe to their families.

Haywood's boss's insistence that his force not wear vests to project an air of safety and reassurance to the public reflects the department's strained, poorly organized infrastructure. It also signifies the triumph of empty, symbolic gesture over meaningful action. The failures of each department reflects the overall sense of unease and foreboding that seemed to envelop the city, as captured in the anxious, disillusioned testimonies of many of Smith's interview subjects.

TO LOOK LIKE GIRLS FROM LITTLE

Smith interviews Elvira Evers, a general worker and cashier at Canteen Corporation. Evers is a Panamanian woman dressed in a plaid shirt. She holds a baby in her lap. Evers describes the looting that occurred in her store. She heard someone throw a bottle and felt a sudden moist, tingling sensation and saw that she was bleeding. Evers's friend, Frances, inspected her and told her she'd been shot. Evers was in disbelief, lamenting how she'd never done anything to "those people."

Evers's monologue offers the perspective of another of the riots' victims. Evers doesn't explicitly condemn the rioters, but the "us vs. them" mentality that is at the core of LA's racial tensions in the late 20th century comes through in her designation of the rioters as "those people."

Evers and Frances rushed to the hospital, where an examination confirmed that Evers's baby's heart was still beating. She recalls how her doctor told her they didn't know how deep the bullet had gone and that they would need to operate on her to be safe. They'd also remove the baby. This was the last thing she remembered. Later on, she heard Dr. Thomas announcing the birth of a healthy baby girl. The doctors had removed a bullet from the baby's elbow. If the baby hadn't "caught [the] bullet in her arms," mother and baby would've been dead. "So it's like / open your eyes, / watch what is goin' on."

The wisdom Evers finds in her baby having "caught [the] bullet in her arms" becomes a metaphor for transcending racial tension: people must "open [their] eyes" to the world around them—to disparate races, cultures, and ways of being—if they want to survive. Smith emphasizes Evers's remark to suggest that a major contributing factor to the riots was people not knowing or looking after their neighbors, which led to a broader collapse of community.

NATIONAL GUARD

Smith interviews Julio Menjivar, a lumber salesman and driver in his late 20s from El Salvador. They're sitting in a covered patio near South Central Los Angeles. Menjivar describes seeing police pass through the neighborhood without attempting to stop any of the rioting. It was as though they were laughing, saying "Go for it, / it's your neighborhood." Menjivar recalls standing to the side, watching the chaos unfold around him when suddenly, the National Guard arrived in droves. The forced everyone to the ground. Menjivar was in the middle of a group, and a member of the Guard forced him up, berating and kicking him.

Menjivar's account illustrates the bad policing that took place throughout the riots. First, Menjivar notes how the police did nothing to intervene in the violence, and even seemed to encourage rioters. Menjivar's observations expand on those made by Captain Haywood in "A Badge of Courage." More shocking is the National Guard's unprovoked apprehension of Menjivar and other nonviolent residents.

Menjivar's family saw what happened and tried to step in. Menjivar remembers how the National Guard were so angry they almost shot his mother and sister. He recalls one man crying because his handcuffs were too tight. Menjivar had never been arrested before, neither in the U.S. nor in El Salvador, and being in jail was a frightening experience for him. Now, he has a record, a $250 fine, and a three-year probation period.

Critics of the violence, such as Judith Tur in the scene "War Zone," attribute destruction solely to the rioters. But Menjivar's account shows that the rioters weren't the only people to behave violently and hurt people: police and the National Guard harmed people and, as Menjivar implies, totally upended his life by arresting him for seemingly no reason.

THAT'S ANOTHER STORY

Smith interviews Katie Miller, a bookkeeper and accountant. She speaks loudly, quickly, and forcefully. Miller believes that talk of Black rioters targeting Korean stores isn't entirely true. She suggests that the stores that were burned were owned by people who didn't take the time to know the people who lived in their community. Miller also claims that it was Mexican people, not Black people, who looted in Koreatown. This is how it was during the 1965 Watts riots, too.

Miller tries to add nuance to the overgeneralized media accounts of the riots. She suggests that stores that were burned were targeted because their owners didn't take the time to know or respect the communities they served—not because of race alone. While she tries to add complexity to the state of race relations between Black and Korean residents, however, she is quick to make generalized statements about Mexican people being solely responsible for the Koreatown lootings.

While Miller didn't loot during these riots, she supports those who did. After things settled down, she walked through the neighborhood and came across Paul Moyer, a newscaster on Channel 4, out front of the Magnin store. When she turned on the news later, she saw Moyer reporting on the looting, referring to the looters as "thugs" and reminiscing about how he used to go into Magnin as a child. The comments enraged Miller, who wondered why Moyer thought it was okay for the looters to go into other stores, but not those he had a personal connection to—or stores where rich people shop.

Miller's support for the riots comes from a deep frustration for the unequal treatment Black people receive in the eyes of the law and the media. She illustrates this latter point with her story about broadcaster Paul Moyer, who seems to place higher value on stores with which he has a personal, sentimental connection than the minority-owned businesses that were destroyed. Miller sees a double standard at play: the privileged classes are content to let minority-populated neighborhoods fall victim to economic disadvantage and violence, but the moment these social ills affect their neighborhoods, they consider it a tragedy.

GODZILLA

Smith interviews Anonymous Man #2, a Hollywood Agent. They sit in a chic office in Beverly Hills as the man describes the "uneasiness" that brewed in the air of the ritzy restaurant where he and other Hollywood people were eating lunch on the day the riots began. All the white, upper-middle- and upper-class people who frequented the restaurant were gossiping about what was happening in South Central, though it was still "business as usual" in their part of the city. The agent guesses it was "generic guilt" that caused "these people's" unrest.

The Hollywood agent offers another privileged perspective on the riots. Unlike Menjivar and Evers, who both sustained psychological and physical trauma from their close proximity to the riots, the Hollywood Agent and his cohort remained safely tucked away in wealthy neighborhoods untouched by the immediate effects of the riots.

As the Hollywood Agent and his group returned to their office, they saw people running around. They decided to close the office for the day, which was unprecedented for the business—it never shuts down. Someone announced that "they" were burning down the Beverly Center, though nobody would say who "they" were. All that was important, the agent notes, was that "they" were not "us."

The Hollywood Agent's monologue reaffirms the "us vs. them" dichotomy present throughout the play. In this instance, us vs. them designates those who fear becoming victims (like the Agent) and those demonstrating lawlessness.

The agent recalls watching as the office hurriedly emptied out. He describes hordes of middle-aged "yuppies" in their expensive suits "fleeing like / wild-eyed… / All you needed was Godzilla behind them." He laughs, since at this point nothing had happened. The agent was the last to leave the building.

Even the threat that the riots could hypothetically *disrupt their privileged lives sends the entitled upper-class "fleeing" […] as though "Godzilla [was] behind them." The Hollywood Agent's testimony sheds additional light on the class tensions that contributed to LA's state of unrest preceding the riots. In the Agent's terrified peers, he describes a class of people for whom the mere threat of having their sheltered lives disrupted is as terrifying as a monster movie.*

The agent remembers having a lot of conflicted thoughts when he feared for his and his family's lives. He thought, "I deserve it," then decided that it wasn't his fault. Rather, it was the verdict that provoked the **violence**. Then he decided that the verdict "was just the spark," and that tensions had been brewing for years; they were the product of a system that allows for unequal pay. He realized that all the rioters were "victims of the system." Knowing this made him realize he did feel some guilt. He saw how "heartbreaking" it was so see so much "devastation" in the burned neighborhood.

The agent seems genuinely conflicted about his complicity in the oppression of LA's disadvantaged communities. He acknowledges how the riots were about more than the LAPD officers' not guilty verdicts at the first Rodney King trial—they originate from deep-seated racial and class tensions. Still, the man's concern doesn't seem to transform into action, and at the end of the day, his remorse at the "devastation" that wreaks havoc on a distant part of the city does little to improve the situation.

KINDA LONELY

Smith interviews the Park family. They sit in the Parks' new, modern home in Fullerton. Walter Park was shot through the eye during the riots. June, his wife, sits next to him, dressed elegantly. Chris Oh, June's son and Walter's stepson, sits with his parents. Ravel plays on the sound system. Mr. Park speaks confidently, but his wife and son make motions intended to make Smith see that he doesn't know what he's saying. This is because Park has been heavily sedated ever since the shooting.

Walter Park is another Korean American victim of the riots. The Parks' situation is certainly a tragic one. The new home in the nice Fullerton neighborhood of Los Angeles, combined with the Ravel (an early 20th-cenutry French composer) playing on the sound system evokes a family whose experience in America had been one of economic prosperity and upward social mobility. Yet, this success doesn't protect the family from becoming victims of the riots.

Walter Park recalls feeling "lonely" inside his store. He decided he needed to go to Korea to see his mother. He talks about calling some guys and telling them about his plans to "go Korea, / see if I can change, uh, / situation." One of the men asked Park why he wanted to go to Korea so soon after he was released from the hospital. Park wondered about that. He went home and told June about his plans. She said nothing in response, which is typical of her. Park pauses before stating that it's common for Koreans to hide things from people they really love. If silence is how June loves him, it's fine, "and [he] ha[s] to pay her back / that makes it even."

Walter's confused ramblings about needing to return to Korea to "change, uh, / situation" add to the emotional weight of his monologue. He seems, perhaps unconsciously, to want to address what has happened to him—but he's either unable or unwilling to do so directly. Walter's words are primarily the effect of his brain injury and sedation. However, his impulse to embrace his Korean culture suggests, perhaps, an unconscious detachment from America in light of the country's failure to protect his family from suffering during the riots.

TO DRIVE

Smith interviews Chris Oh, a medical student, and Walter Park's stepson. Oh reveals his stepfather doesn't know he's had a partial lobectomy after the bullet passed through his temple and lodged itself in his frontal lobe. Chris explains how a person's higher learning skills and overall character come from the frontal lobe. He pauses before meditating on how different Walter's life is now that he can't do many of things he used to do, such as drive.

If anything, Chris Oh's explanation downplays the ways his stepfather's injuries have changed his life: his personality is irreparably altered, and he will never be capable of completing even simple everyday activities, such as driving. The placement of the Park family's story after accounts like Katie Miller's complicates the audience's sense of morality and shows how justice is complex and rarely absolute. Miller's idea of justice has caused the Park family to weather a devastating tragedy.

AND IN MY HEART FOR HIM

Smith interviews June Park, Walter Park's husband. June cries as she talks about Walter, who came to the U.S. 28 years ago and operated a business in Compton for 20 years. He was nice to everyone, knew the people who lived and worked nearby, and donated to the community. She asks, why was he shot? June admits that she has a lot of anger and cries a lot these days. She spends all her time at the hospital. People aren't allowed to stay in the ICU. But the hospital staff know her, she brings them doughnuts, and they can see how much she loves her husband. She "spend[s] all [her] time / and in [her] heart for him."

June's desperate plea to rationalize her husband's shooting further points to the relativity of justice. It's impossible to explain why Walter had to be shot. June's remark about Walter's kindness and engagement with his community also complicates Katie Miller's earlier remark about Korean shops only being targeted due to their owners' failures to respect or get to know their communities. In reality, justice and injustice are not as straightforward or well-defined as June or Katie Miller want to think.

EXECUTION STYLE

Smith interviews Chris Oh, Walter Park's stepson. Oh explains how a witness stated that Walter pressed on the accelerator after he was shot, ramming his car into a telephone pole. The shooter, a Black man, approached Walter's car when he was at a stoplight, broke the window, and fired at him at close range, "execution style."

With each new victim testimony, Smith further complicates the audience's sense of right and wrong, justice and injustice. Just as she concludes an account that validates and the frustrations of rioters and seems to justify their violence, she presents a new account that renders the violence senseless, brutal, and unjustified.

THE BEVERLY HILLS HOTEL

Smith interviews Elaine Young, a real estate agent. Whose clients are mostly rich movie stars. Young's face is disfigured from plastic surgery. She's written about her injuries in a number of magazines. She's an outgoing woman whose phone is always ringing. Elaine tells Smith about something she said that got her into trouble on the second day of the riots. She explains how her date cancelled on her. Newly separated, she didn't want to be alone. However, all the news alerts were telling everyone not to leave their homes or travel on the freeway. She called her date, who arrived to pick her up.

Elaine Young's testimony may be grouped with that of the anonymous Hollywood Agent or Judith Tur—both offer a glimpse of the riots through the perspective of LA's upper class. Smith includes a description of Young's plastic surgery-altered face in her stage directions, perhaps, to highlight Young's wealth—though it's also impossible to tell at this point if the plastic surgery is purely cosmetic, or whether it corrects injuries sustained during the riots.

When Elaine's date arrived, they wondered where they would eat, since everything was closed. Elaine suggested they try the Beverly Hills Hotel. When they arrived, Elaine encountered swarms of "picture-business people" gathered at the hotel, lamenting the recent unrest. Elaine and her date joined them and everyone commiserated, asking themselves how something like this "could happen in California." Elaine joined the people who gathered in the Polo Lounge of the Beverly Hills Hotel, staying until late in the night to avoid being alone. After they talked about hardship for long enough, they shifted to happier subjects to lift their moods.

What's remarkable about Elaine's testimony about the riots is the absence of the riots. In this way, Elaine's experience is similar to the Hollywood Agent's—both of their days were remarkably normal, with the exception of a slight sense of unease in the atmosphere. However, they experience no direct threats to their lives or livelihood, which is far removed from the experiences of people like the Parks, for instance.

When a news crew later interviewed Elaine to discuss the closing of the Polo Lounge, Elaine talked to them about happier times when she and her daughter would pack a bag and drive a few minutes down the road to the Beverly Hills Hotel to pretend they were on vacation—Elaine never had enough time off work to go on a real vacation. After the interview aired, a man wrote to her, berating her for making light of the riots and criticizing her affluent companions for partying while many others suffered. She wishes he had left his number so she could explain herself to him. In reality, she was just reacting in the moment to feeling safe and like she belonged with the people who were gathered at the Beverley Hills Hotel, where "no one can hurt us [...] 'cause it was like a fortress."

Elaine seems genuinely unaware of how glib her comments to the reporter sounded to people whose lives were directly impacted by the riots. Again, Smith shows how out of touch the upper classes are. To Elaine, the Beverly Hills Hotel—and, by extension, her class privilege—is "like a fortress" that separates her and protects her from the lives of LA's underprivileged communities. It shields her from experiencing and sympathizing with their systemic oppression and despair.

I WAS SCARED

Smith interviews an anonymous female student at the University of Southern California. They're in the woman's sorority house in a room filled with Laura Ashley brand furnishings. The woman talks about feeling "scared to death" when the riots began. She and sorority sisters were worried the protestors would attack sorority row, as they had during the Watts riots. The women packed their bags and sat in the hallway upstairs, listening for intruders.

Smith describes the Laura Ashley brand furnishings that adorn the sorority woman's room to signify her class status. Though not a luxury designer, the brand mimics Victorian-era designs and suggests an upper-middle class background. Smith's stage directions suggest to the audience that this account, like Elaine Young's before it, will relive the riots through the eyes of someone from a privileged background. USC's campus is located nearer to where much of the riots' action occurred than Elaine Young's location in Beverly Hills, so her and her sorority sisters' fears may be more justified than those of Young and the Hollywood Agent.

The student describes how her parents were on their way to California to take part in a caravan of old 40s cars, but she told them to turn around, since her father "[would] die" if one of the rioters hit his prized 1941 Cadillac with a bottle. The woman launches into a long monologue about all the different antique cars her father owns: Lincolns, Continentals, Town and Countries. They are his prized possessions.

The woman transitions from talking about how she feared for her life into a tangent about her father's prized classic cars. Her hyperbolic insistence that her father "[would] die" if one of the rioters damaged the car is yet another example how out of touch the upper classes are with the experiences of LA's marginalized communities. As people literally die in the riots, all the woman can think about is how her father will figuratively die if a rioter damages his personal property.

THE UNHEARD

Smith interviews Maxine Waters, Congresswoman for California's 35th District. This interview is taken from a speech Waters delivered at the First African Methodist Episcopal Church (FAME) shortly after Daryl Gates's resignation and the riots. Smith notes that FAME is an important gathering place for political activity in LA. Movie stars go there, and Arsenio Hall frequently attends. Smith shifts her focus to Waters, describing the congresswoman as "elegant, confident," and "with a big smile, a fierce bite, and a lot of guts." In her speech, Waters speaks of the police brutality and institutionalized racism that created the unrest the city just saw.

Daryl Gates stepped down as chief of the LAPD on May 30, 1993, after repeated calls for his resignation from the public. It's not unusual that Waters would decide to deliver a speech at FAME. The church has long been a center for political and social action in Los Angeles. Waters, for her part, is a powerful person, as a Congresswoman. Speaking about the reasons for the riots offers hope that she and other powerful people will use their clout to try to advocate for change and prevent a repeat of the riots.

In 1992, Waters states, the state of the country is very much the same as it was decades ago, after a Kerner Commission report publicized these social injustices. She addresses the president, stating, "THEY'RE HUNGRY IN THE BRONX TONIGHT, / THEY'RE HUNGRY IN ATLANTA TONIGHT, / THEY'RE HUNGRY IN ST. LOUIS TONIGHT." She appeals to the president to think of the children, whose lives are threatened by **violence**: of "young men who have been dropped off of America's agenda." She addresses the president and the governor, explaining how everyone in the street is "not a thug / or a hood" or criminal. She admonishes people who judge those who commit petty theft, stealing diapers or a pair of shoes out of desperation. If these people are criminals, then what about the President's transgressions?

Waters contextualizes LA's current (1992) crisis within the broader history of the government failing to give adequate aid to low-income communities. In 1967, following a summer of urban riots, the White House ordered the Kerner Commission to investigate the cause of this social unrest. The resulting report, published in 1967, provided unequivocal evidence that lack of employment opportunity, police brutality, and economic underdevelopment were the leading causes of the riots, yet the government effectively ignored all of the report's suggestions for ways to improve the infrastructure of impoverished urban centers. Waters sees the government's response to the 1992 riots as history repeating itself, as she is not seeing the state or federal governments addressing the systemic issues that incited the riots. Lastly, Waters draws attention to the double standards of lawfulness applied to white and powerful people and Black, poor, or otherwise marginalized people. A disadvantaged Black person is considered a "thug" or "hood" for stealing basic necessities out of desperation, yet the President of the United States (George H.W. Bush at the time of Waters's address) remains in a position of immense power despite having committed what Waters implies are more serious transgressions (though it's unclear what she's referring to).

Waters criticizes public leaders who want her to go to Watts and tell the protestors to "Cool it, baby," as Black leaders had done during the civil rights movement. But she is too angry to do this, and too angry at journalists who try to tell her what she should and shouldn't say. While it's "unfortunate" that people have turned to **violence** to express their anger, "riot / is the voice of the unheard."

Unlike many of the authority figures in the play so far, Waters explicitly refuses to condemn the rioters' violence. Her remark that "riot / is the voice of the unheard" validates the violence, framing civil unrest as "the voice" of people whom society silences through disenfranchisement.

WASHINGTON

Smith interviews Maxine Waters in Waters's office in Los Angeles. It's the winter of 1993. Waters's original office was burned down during the riots. She speaks of how out of touch Washington is with "what really goes on in the world." It's more than just being "insensitive" or indifferent: "they really / don't / know." She laughs as she recalls the ways she forced her peers to see their ignorance. For instance, when she heard about the White House's plans for an "urban package," she was shocked that they wouldn't involve her or the chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, John Lewis. In fact, she only heard about the meeting on television.

In emphasizing Washington's ignorance about the inner workings of life in the U.S.'s urban centers, Waters shows how powerful government institutions struggle to govern effectively because they're so removed and impersonal. She portrays this ignorance in a detached manner, framing it as less a nefarious example of racial prejudice and more a systemic flaw. Put another way, she suggests that the oppression of minority communities is less a cause of calculated racist behavior as it is the consequence of a system that upholds racism as the status quo.

When Waters called the Speaker to ask why she wasn't invited, he claimed not to control White House invitations—that's the president's job. When the Speaker told her he was on his way to the meeting, Waters, infuriated, announced that she was, too. When she arrived at the White House and asked where her seat was, the room was silent. When the president arrived, he appeared confused but acted cordially. After some back-and-forth about the bill, Waters told the president about all the things the recently destroyed, hopeless city of Los Angeles needed to recover: job programs, stipends, and help for the young people who have dropped out of society.

It's unclear whether Water's absent invitation to the negotiations for the White House's "urban package" was a calculated decision or a mistake. Either way, the oversight demonstrates how institutions inhibit effectual change at structural and operational levels. Waters's background as a Black woman who grew up in urban poverty puts her in the unique position to combine her firsthand knowledge of urban struggle with her institutional connections to create changes that could actually help Los Angeles's communities in crisis.

Waters told the president he should ask Jack Kemp, who was working on housing projects, to vouch for her statements. Kemp protested, claiming it wasn't his department and would be better addressed by Secretary Lynn Martin. Martin was absent from the meaning, but her representative, a Black man who didn't look Black, addressed the president and confirmed the accuracy of all of Waters's statements. The president appeared uncomfortable, fixating on another point Waters made about the Justice Department never doing anything about the excessive force police inflict on cities. Martin's representative from the Department of Labor turned to the President and confirmed Waters's words, stating, "This country is falling / apart."

The president shifts focus away from Los Angeles's suffering communities to police brutality because police brutality is more easily addressed via symbolic gesture, i.e., banning choke-holds to appear invested in fixing corruption while not doing anything to fix it at the broader, systemic level. Martin's representative, meanwhile, implies that no matter where one puts their focus, the problem is the same: without changing something and doing more to serve poor urban communities, the country will continue to disintegrate.

TROPHIES

Smith interviews Paul Parker, Chairperson for Free the LA Four Plus Defense Committee. It's October 1993. Smith and Parker, who is dressed smartly, sit in Parker's girlfriend's Westwood house. While Parker wore African clothing in court, he wears "Ivy League clothing" here to fit in.

"Ivy League clothing" signifies the style of dress deemed acceptable by America's wealthy, educated elite. Parker wears these clothes to gain acceptance from the dominant culture he has to work with to advance his grassroots campaign.

Parker describes how Gates and the police department were criticized for attending a benefit banquet while the rebellion took place outside. He sees this as proof of how far Gates went to "get these brothers." When the police came for Parker's brother, Lance, they sent two SWAT teams, one to Lance's residence and the other to their mother's. There were cameras everywhere, and police were spreading the rumor that Lance was a notorious gang member and drug dealer. In reality, Lance is college-educated and employed at a law firm. Yet, the media attacked him, accusing him of shooting Reginald Denny and blowing up gas pumps. They brought up Parker's father's death in the streets a decade ago and tried to frame it as "black-on-black crime."

Parker is referring to former LAPD police chief Daryl Gates's decision to attend a benefit for opponents of Prop F (an amendment that would impose term limits on LA police chiefs) at the time the verdict for Rodney King's Simi Valley trial was announced. Parker views Gates's absence as symbolic proof that Gates is more invested in political ambition than serving the community. Parker's critique of law enforcement's campaign against his brother focuses on the misconception that Black people are naturally criminals. There's an assumption that Lance must have been involved in Denny's attack because his father was a criminal, and it was a given that Lance would follow in this path, too. These assumptions clash with Lance's reality, which Parker construes as a success story of upward mobility.

Parker refused to let the police continue their smear campaign against Lance. He tells Smith about how he quit his job with law enforcement (Parker had been with the Army for six years) and took up advocacy full time. He was elected chairperson of the Free the LA Four Plus Defense Committee and has worked there ever since. Parker argues that the LA Four were targeted because Denny is white. Were he a person of color, Parker argues, nobody would care. There are a lot of people who get beaten every day, yet no news stations report it. In contrast, Denny is paraded around the nation, invited onto talk shows and celebrated.

Parker's talk of law enforcement's smear campaign against Lance resonates with Angela King's earlier monologue about law enforcement's campaign against Rodney King. Both cases try to impose some moral or character flaw onto their target to validate their own bureaucratic misconduct and poor policing. The smear campaigns directly contrast the media's depiction of Denny, whose beating is condemned with no questions about his private life or personality. Parker suggests that Black people are held to a higher standard to have their injustices taken seriously. They have to be upstanding citizens to matter, whereas white folks need only exist.

Parker doesn't feel empathy for Denny because so few people feel empathy for Black people, who are regularly pulled over, made to exit their cars, and sit idly on the curb while the police rummage through their cars, all while knowing they are innocent. Parker argues that Denny should be happy he's alive, since many Black people who didn't attend the riots would wish him dead. Meanwhile, the state did everything they could to convict the LA Four.

Parker can't sympathize with Denny because he sees the public outcry over Denny's attack as a blatant example of the double standard of pursuing justice Black versus white people. He tries to illustrate how society bends over backward to pursue justice for white people but seems to believe that the Black people ought to accept some degree of injustice or unfairness in their lives.

Parker recalls speaking out on April 29, describing the moment as "good for the soul." He ran track and played other sports that day, and the feeling the riots gave him was better than any wins he'd ever achieved in an official athletic competition. He has many awards and trophies from his days as an athlete, but April 29 made him feel better than any of the trophies ever could. They lost 700 million dollars.

Parker's description of the riots as being "good for the soul" casts the violence as therapeutic. It speaks to the level of oppression the Black community experiences that violence and chaos becomes restorative. His comments also speak to Parker's philosophy on justice. He interprets seeking justice as making the oppressor pay for the harm they've done to the oppressed.

Next, Parker responds to claims that Black people "burned down your own neighborhoods." In reality, most stores burned down belonged to Korean people, who Parker states are "like the Jews in the day." He recalls demolishing droves of Korean businesses—of accomplishing "more in three days than all these / politicians been doin' for years." Now, everyone feels free and vindicated, having shown the world that Black people are done accepting the world's injustices.

Parker's discriminatory remarks against both Korean American and Jewish people shows how systems of oppression gain power by pitting marginalized groups against each other. This way, marginalized groups remain in the dark about who their real enemy is (Smith implies that the enemy is the broader institutions that keep everyone in check) and instead, fight with each other.

Next, Parker discusses the meaning of his movement's motto: No Justice No Peace. When he has his own house one day, he vows to dedicate one room to the motto. Its walls will be decorated with newspaper clippings and other mementos so his son can see what his father accomplished and what it takes to be a strong Black man. To Parker, No Justice No Peace means that if there's no justice for Black people, their oppressors will have no peace. A person might have escaped with only "a dent in [their] head from now on," but it may be that their daughter or someone else down the line suffers more severe consequences. Parker vows that when he dies, he won't die peacefully if there's no justice. He sees himself as "one brother / doing the work of / on brother."

Parker's riot room tribute differs greatly from the riot room Denny described in his earlier monologue. Denny's room emphasizes compassion and forgiveness while Parker's highlights violence, retribution, and unrest. However, his motto "No Justice, No Peace" makes an important point, and one that others throughout the play make in different ways: that until something happens to improve conditions in LA's poorer communities, everyone is going to continue to suffer.

IT'S AWFUL HARD TO BREAK AWAY

Smith interviews Daryl Gates, the former chief of the Los Angeles Police Department and a current talk show host. They sit in the lounge of the radio station where Gates delivers his show. He's in good shape and wears a tight golf shirt and jeans. Gates begins by claiming it wasn't a fundraiser he was attending, but rather meeting with a group of people who were talking about their opposition to Proposition F—people who had backed him "right from the beginning / of this controversy" and who also opposed Prop. F. Gates claims he had agreed to attend the event before he knew when the verdicts were supposed to be announced. In retrospect, he realizes he should have had the sense to know not to attend.

Gates's correction of minor details (he was at a meeting, not a fundraiser) seems defensive. The impression is that he's trying to cover for a decision he knows was a misstep. Indeed, Gates's absence at the announcement of the verdicts for King's Simi Valley trial were viewed highly unfavorably and caused the public to demand his resignation. To the public, Gates's attendance at a Proposition F fundraiser suggested he prioritized politics and personal ambition over public servitude and justice.

Gates continues to make defensive, weak excuses for his presence at the not-fundraiser. He insists that the event wasn't the "cocktail party" the public has made it out to be. At any rate, he insists it wouldn't have made any difference if he'd hidden himself away and said nothing in response to the riots. Gates criticizes people who accuse him of being "stubborn" and "obstinate," and who have called for him to resign. He believes his resignation would have only further "demoralized" his department. When he finally spoke out, he states, a lot of people recognized his words as in line with the things they wished they could say. This was especially true for police officers who were angry about "being accused of things / that / they wouldn't think of doing."

Gates's assemblage of weak excuses for his attendance at the Prop F. event seem desperate and frenzied. He seems to be far more concerned with maintaining a respectable reputation and prolonging his career than he is with doing that career well. Gates also attempts to justify his position by suggesting that other people agree with him—and while several of Smith's interview subjects do say similar things, many more see Gates as self-absorbed and corrupt.

Gates continues, stating his belief that most people are upset about the negative things newspapers and TV news are saying about police officers. He bemoans the "really nasty" community activists and politicians who speak poorly of law enforcement.

As Gates defends police officers, he mirrors what Garcetti said about officers experiencing a type of "magic" when they testify. He suggested white, privileged people want to trust the police, but media reports are making it difficult for officers to keep ahold of that "magic."

Gates resents having become "the symbol / of police oppression / in the United States / if not the world." He cites his 43 years with law enforcement and his flawless record to convey how absurd it is that he could suddenly become associated with oppression and police brutality. He also describes a recent poll that boasted his popularity. Gates laments how his life and reputation have been ruined "just because some officers / whacked Rodney King."

Gates's complaint about being "the symbol / of police oppression [...] just because some officers / whacked Rodney King" magnifies Gate's struggle and minimizes King's attack. Again, Gates's political ambition trumps his obligations as a public servant. Once more, corrupt institutions enable oppression to persist.

HUMAN REMAINS

Smith interviews Dean Gilmour, Lieutenant and Coroner for Los Angeles County. Gilmore is a friendly man who speaks slowly. He talks about working with an attorney to have a young woman declared dead. The girl and her boyfriend were looting a New Guys appliance store in South-Central that caught fire during the riots. The boyfriend is thought to be the only person to escape the flames, though squads searched the building multiple times and couldn't find any human remains.

Gilmour's monologue focuses on an aspect of the riots Smith has yet to cover in depth: the nearly 60 casualties. After Parker described the riots as cathartic, the play now shows the casualties that his monologue ignored. These deaths suggest that the justice Parker felt is not as simple as he portrayed it. Rather, his catharsis comes with a hefty price: inflicting harm upon someone else.

Gilmour ruminates about how the missing people's families—and humanity more broadly—need closure and ceremony to move on after a death. He describes the almost 60 fatalities that occurred during the riots, but he suggests that it's difficult to say which of these deaths were caused by the riots themselves. Furthermore, shouldn't officials consider whether gang shootings that occurred during the riots should count as riot-related? After all, there are gang shootings every day.

Gilmour's ruminations about the need for closure following a loss suggests that in many ways, people are much the same: they all crave more or less the same thing when a loved one dies. This is something, he suggests, that transcends race and class differences. Then, he also implies that those who died as a direct result of the riots are somehow considered more tragic than the deaths that occur every day—suggesting that many people are numb to the regular violence.

Gilmour rambles on about which deaths are and are not attributed to the riots. He talks more about human remains, describing in detail how they decay over time, naturally or with the help of animal scavengers. Gilmour shuffles through his papers to try to find a press release and recalls his personal experiences with death: his child was stillborn, his brother was murdered, his sister was killed by a drunk driver. He explains how his own grief allows him to empathize with victims' families. Finally, Gilmour locates the press release. He reads the details aloud: 41 gunshot wounds, 26 Black fatalities, 18 Hispanic, 10 Caucasian, two Asian. Mostly male, mostly the victims of gunshot wounds. Four deaths involved the LAPD. Gilmour closes his monologue by remarking, "Let's pray for peace, hunh?"

Gilmour's tangent about death and decay, combined with his summary of riot casualties broken down demographically, have the effect of dehumanizing victims. Death becomes less of a personal concern than a scientific process, and the lives lost become statistics instead of people. His remark, "Let's pray for peace, hunh?" also suggest an air of resignation. He seems to imply that the riots and casualties will soon fade from public consciousness, but people will continue to die violent, senseless deaths if nothing changes.

LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT

Smith interviews Peter Sellars, a director. Seller describes the conflict of Eugene O'Neill's tragic play, *Long Day's Journey into Night*. In the play, the father figure, James Tyrone, is too cheap to replace his house's burnt-out lightbulbs, leaving his family to live in darkness. Sellars suggests that this is similar to the state of contemporary America. He returns to the play, describing how Tyrone's life has been consumed by providing for his family, and influenced by "a culture of success,." And yet, he refuses to replace the bulbs. In America, Sellars suggests, there is no family, and no house to return to. "We can't live, / our own house burning," says Sellars.

Sellars identifies a disconnect between Tyrone's desire to look successful and the reality of his situation, which involves a suffering family whose lives do not benefit from this outward display of success. Sellars sees the same disconnect in Los Angeles: the city wants to project an image of progress and functionality, while ignoring the systemic problems that perpetuate social ills and racial tension. Sellars's remark that "we can't live / [with] our own house burning" suggests that the facade of functionality LA wishes to project is unsustainable if the city refuses to address the problems that plague its most vulnerable communities.

Sellars continues with the house analogy. Even though the fire might only be burning in the basement, soon it will spread, leaving even the top floor uninhabitable. And shutting the door to one's own room does little to stop the flames. Sellars closes his statement by remarking that O'Neill "wrote the classic play about / the American dream."

Sellars suggests that a community or city is only as healthy as its most disenfranchised, oppressed residents. If the lower classes and oppressed demographics are suffering while the rich and privileged flourish, the city has failed to realize "the American dream."

I REMEMBER GOING...

Smith interviews Reverend Tom Choi, a Chinese American minister at Westwood Presbyterian Church. Choi's church boasts a wealthy congregation. Choi is tall, thin, and Yale-educated. Choi speaks about going out on Saturday to clean up after the riots. He purposefully decided to wear his clerical collar, which he hasn't done in years, as it makes him uncomfortable to be called "Father." But he did it on Saturday because he didn't want to be mistaken for a Korean shop owner and beaten for it.

Choi wore his clerical collar as symbolic protection against any residual unrest that might be lingering in the aftermath of the riots. His impulse to protect himself also emphasizes the existing tensions between Korean American people and their Black neighbors. These tensions originated when many Korean immigrants took over businesses abandoned by Jewish shopkeepers in the aftermath of the Watts riots.

Remembering hearing complaints about Korean Americans not supporting Black-owned businesses, Choi intentionally chose to go to a Black-owned business for lunch. He stood up tall and talked to everyone he encountered, asking them "How are you doing?" Everyone answered, "Oh, I'm doing all right," or something to that effect. Choi was struck by the kindness and warmth of the people TV stations had just made out to be "hostile." What Choi experienced wasn't hostility, but a desire to join forces and weather the storm together. He realized then that the protection he needed wasn't in his clerical collar—it was in "whatever love [he] had in [his] heart to share with people."

The complaints about Korean American people not supported Black-owned businesses expands on existing tensions that arose from Black people feeling that Korean shopkeepers were unfairly taking control of their neighborhood and depriving them of economic opportunity. Choi's positive experience patronizing the Black-owned business supports the play's central thesis that venturing outside of one's community to transcend racial boundaries and recognize the shared experiences of all people is the first step in alleviating racial tension and creating a more equitable future. He finds that his effort to connect and share "whatever love [he] had in [his] heart" offered exponentially more protection than the empty, symbolic gesture of his clerical collar.

A JUNGIAN COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

Smith interviews Paula Weinstein, a movie producer, over the phone. Weinstein is in Chicago, shooting on location. Weinstein describes the "odd" and "isolating" sensation of witnessing the riot and wondering what the rioters would do. She remembers assembling a group to hold a press conference on the Warner Brothers lot. Some people continued to take issue with the statement Warner Brothers made, condemning their decision to challenge the verdict.

The issue of corporations making statements on controversial current events is a complex issue that skirts the line between moral obligation and empty symbolic gesture. On the one hand, Warner Brothers may believe that condemning the Simi Valley verdict makes them look good, as they're calling out what they perceive as injustice. However, public statements are also way for a company to control their brand without becoming actively involved in civic or political struggle—so the statement may be meaningless.

Weinstein describes feeling pressured to deliver a "paternalistic" response calling for an end to the **violence**. However, nobody felt comfortable saying they understood the injustice of the verdict and understood the resulting violence. Weinstein recalls how 14 young people employed by Warner Brothers came to live at her house after they deemed their own houses unsafe. They had come to Weinstein's company because of their politics and the company's reputation for being "a place to come and talk." She describes the "Jungian collective unconscious" that overtook the white kids and Black middle-class kids who came to live with her. Watching the news unfold on TV, they connected as "political kids."

The complexity of the riots put corporations and public figures in a difficult situation, since it wasn't all that clear on which side justice lay. Much of America was outraged at seeing the Rodney King beating video and even more outraged when the first jury found the officers involved to be not guilty. At the same time, it was difficult to back the violence and destruction of the ensuing riots. Weinstein's remark about the "Jungian collective unconscious" she witnessed overtake the kids refers to a concept developed by the psychologist Carl Jung. In Jungian psychology, the collective unconscious is a body of unconscious, instinctual knowledge about the world that is thought to be shared by the collective humanity. In other words, it's not knowledge about the world that one gains from one's subjective experiences—it's something innate. When Weinstein claims to have sensed a "collective unconscious" come over the kids, she means that being subjected to crisis inspired kids form otherwise disparate walks of life to take refuge in their shared experiences as people.

Weinstein describes how people who had lived in Los Angeles their entire lives and had never been to South Central traveled in caravans to distribute food. She notes how strange LA's racial segregation is, particularly compared to other cities like Chicago. Weinstein describes her trip to this new part of LA as "an extraordinary time." She and the kids distributed food to people. The people distributing food formed a "multiracial / and multicultural line of people." There was a sense of community, and one could "fe[el] the possibility" that real change could happen.

This passage expands on Weinstein's evocation of the Jungian collective unconscious. The riots inspired everyone to set aside their differences and come together as fellow people to help each other. The "multiracial /and multicultural line of people" distributing food is an explicit nod to how this feeling of collective unconsciousness compelled people to transcend racial, cultural boundaries and do something meaningful for other people.

And yet, Weinstein laments, nothing changed. In the end, it was all "language" and "big gestures." What bothered her most was seeing how rich white families guarded their houses and sent their children away "as if / the devil was coming after them." Ultimately, the biggest outcome of the riots was that the media was exploited to make white people fear Black people.

Ultimately, Weinstein suggests that the Jungian collective unconsciousness can't just fix racism and class divides—or people's fear of those they see as fundamentally different. She seems to suggest that unless more people put their fear aside and try to help people (even long after the riots are over), nothing will change.

APPLICATION OF THE LAWS

Smith interviews Bill Bradley, a Democratic senator from New Jersey. Bradley speaks about how the law still treats different people differently. The LA riots made him think about something that happened to his African American friend during an internship with a big LA law firm in the 1970s. The firm's partners traditionally invited the interns to their homes for Sunday brunch. One Sunday, the friend was driving with a white woman intern to a partner's house in a wealthy neighborhood. Suddenly, the police apprehended the pair, apparently believing that the woman was "being held against [her] will." It took 20 minutes to convince the police that the woman was not being held against her will. The officers refused to apologize to Bradley's friend, acting as though nothing had happened as they left the scene. Bradley shares this story to show how the Rodney King incident isn't anything new.

Bradley represented New Jersey in the U.S. Senate from 1979 to1997. The story he shares about his friend's experience being racially profiled shows how widespread systemic racism is in police departments. This is a common method the play employs, interspersing personal anecdotes between statements about the structural flaws that caused the situations described anecdotally. The effect is a nuanced portrayal of racial tensions in 20th-century Los Angeles that shows how systemic flaws harm, terrify, and oppress people.

The riots also make Bill Bradley think back to his friend's story and speak out about the fact that the law partner did nothing when he heard about the intern's unjustified harassment by law enforcement. This causes Bradley to wonder who is responsible for eliciting change. He believes everyone has a responsibility, making comparisons to a teen mother who realizes that having more children diminishes the opportunities for her other children, or the gang member who realizes he is responsible for pulling the trigger of his gun. He argues that institutions, too, have a moral responsibility to use their power to affect change.

Bradley believes that people who are in a position to change things have a moral obligation to do so. People with the protection and reach of powerful institutions, such as the lawyer in the big LA firm, are in a particularly capable position to set change into motion. This offers support for people like Maxine Waters, whom the play showed advocating for change. But it also condemns those like Daryl Gates, who refuses to accept that the LAPD is at all corrupt.

SOMETHING COOKING HERE

Smith interviews Otis Chandler, a director of the Times Mirror Company and former editor of the Los Angeles *Times*. Chandler remarks that there are few families that have had the ability to accumulate wealth generationally. The only examples he can think of are the Kennedys, the Rockefellers, and the Mellons of Pittsburgh. Most wealthy families let their wealth slip away as they become addicted to alcohol or other vices.

Chandler's remarks about wealthy families squandering away their wealth is a cynical response to Bradley's earlier call for institutions to use their power to elicit change. Though it's unclear if he's blaming formerly wealthy families for their own misfortune, he nevertheless suggests that there are increasingly few people with the capital to advocate for change.

Chandler reiterates that he doesn't want to sound hopeless. However, he maintains that if real change is going to happen, it has to be a long-term commitment: it can't be a vague promise to implement policy for a couple years and hope society's deep-seated problems will just go away. Chandler has confidence LA can be a safe city for everyone someday, so long as things don't return to "business as usual," and so long as change isn't confined to lofty speeches.

Chandler distinguishes between the long-term structural overhaul that will need to happen to ease Los Angeles's racial tensions and repair their corrupt police force, and the lofty speeches that occur in the wake of the riots. These speeches are effectively useless, and Chandler suggests they're just distractions as the city slowly returns to "business as usual."

Chandler cautions that this situation has happened before. After the Watts riots, the city was absorbed in a fervent desire for change and social progress. And yet, in just two years, all that hope and energy was lost. He bemoans the separation between the federal and state governments and the country's citizens. Chandler pauses before speculating that change will cost a lot of money and necessitate higher taxes. He anticipates the criticism he'll hear from people who want that money allocated toward AIDs and health care and education, but he insists that rebuilding the city and enacting change is more important. He starts to say that "if our cities deteriorate into jungle land, which they are now…" but he trails off before he can finish his thought.

Again, the play portrays justice as an imperfect, complex issue. With a limited budget, the city must decide which problems are most pressing. Setting aside more money to fund infrastructure projects in minority neighborhoods and create employment opportunities takes away from funds that might otherwise have been allocated to help other people—justice for one group, the play shows, inevitably comes at another group's expense.

A DEADEYE

Smith interviews Owen Smet of the Culver City Police Department. Smet is also a former range manager for the Beverly Hills Gun Club. Smet relates how business at the Gun Club went up drastically after the riots. He attributes this to the collective sense of danger the riots created in the city, as well as to people's desire to protect themselves at any cost. Smet describes himself as "a very good shot," attributing this to his years in Vietnam.

The higher sales at the Gun Club illustrates one of the major consequences of the riots: a heightened sense of fear among LA's more privileged communities, who perceived the violence of the riots and the Black community's call for justice as threats to their livelihood.

Smet explains the guns they keep at the shop: smaller-caliber guns at the top, the most powerful guns at the bottom. Most gangs use nine-millimeter guns for drive-by shootings. Smet feels confident that the gangs are better armed than anyone else.

Smet's comment about gangs draws an implicit comparison between gang violence and the efforts at self-defense undergone by the Gun Club's members. He implies that members are privileged, given the wealth of the Beverly Hills neighborhood. The comparison unintentionally unites Los Angeles's citizens from disparate walks of life, suggesting that what the wealthy and the gang members have in common is a shared desire for self-preservation and a shared sense of fear.

ASK SADDAM HUSSEIN

Smith interviews Elaine Brown, former head of the Black Panther Party and author of *A Taste of Power*. Brown speculates that people associate the Black Panther Party with things other than guns. She believes that young men are drawn to the guns. Brown tells these men about Jonathan Jackson, who was 17, brilliant, and not a gang member. Nevertheless, he went to a courtroom alone and, "in the name of / revolution" took his own life. She asks them if it would be better if Jackson were still alive today. Personally, Brown would rather know Jackson.

Brown seems to suggest that a lot of the young men who joined the ranks of the Black Panther Party were motivated by the clout that came with joining a countercultural organization known for its violent altercations. In a similar vein, the tragedy of Jonathan Jackson is a cautionary tale about getting so absorbed in the symbolic value of a cause that one becomes unable to actually fight for that cause. Brown insinuates that Jackson would have been of more use to the movement had he not taken his own life and had instead applied himself to supporting the Black Panther Party's aims in other ways.

Brown believes that taking a gun to the street with no definite plans is "bizarre" and "foolish." She claims one need only ask "Saddam Hussein / about the power and weaponry" of the United States, and its "willingness to use it." Brown asserts that there's no other country that's better armed or prepared to fight. But Brown doesn't claim young Black men should put down their guns. To the contrary, if one is Black and in America, she thinks it's best that they have a gun, know which enemies to shoot, and know how not to be caught. However, waging a war against the country is different. Just ask Saddam Hussein, or the Vietnamese, or the Nicaraguans, Browns suggests, naming additional victims of the U.S.'s military conquests.

Brown's call for gun-toting young men to ask "Saddam Hussein / about the power and weaponry" of the U.S., and its "willingness to use it" conveys the inability of less organized organizations or regimes to defeat the U.S., one of the most powerful (and armed) nations in the world. By extension, Brown's analogy laments how individual people are mostly unable to exert power over connected, powerful institutions. Brown references a number of revolutionary movements that were quashed by U.S. interference or lack thereof (the 1991 Iraqi uprisings against Saddam Hussein, the Viet Cong during the Vietnam War, the Sandista National Liberation Front of the Nicaraguan Revolution) to show how futile it can be for small groups to take on powerful institutions.

If a person is committed to helping their community, Brown insists they must have a "love of [their] people." She warns people to not get distracted by ego, bravado, or "symbolic vestment." Because right now, Brown argues, Black people are "a piss-poor, / ragtag, unorganized, poorly armed," and "poorly led / army." And at this rate, it will take them "twenty more years" to understand what will become of "Martin, Malcom, / and the Black Panther Party."

Brown calls for advocates not to allow empty symbolic gesture and ego to let them lose sight of their true cause. She argues that succumbing to "symbolic vestment" has historically been the downfall of otherwise promising revolutionary fronts. Essentially, she insists that people get so distracted by the idea of a cause that they forgot what they must do to advance that cause. She cites "Martin [Luther King], Malcom [X], / and the Black Panther Party" as promising forces of the civil rights movement whose efforts were quashed by the people's unwillingness to commit to change in the long run.

TWILIGHT #1

Smith interviews Homi Bhabha, a literary critic, writer, and scholar. Bhabha is in England, so he and Smith talk over the phone. Bhabha describes the period after the riots as a "**twilight** moment" of being "in-between," which is characterized by "ambiguity" and "inclarity." It's from this moment, Bhabha speculates, that real change can spring forth. Looking at the twilight sky forces a person to see the "fuzziness" of "boundaries." Twilight requires more interpretation and forces the viewer to acknowledge "how we are projecting onto the event itself." In contrast, Bhabha observes, daylight provides "clarity" and only requires the viewer to "react to it."

Bhabha's poetic assessment of the riots' impact suggests that crisis has imploded LA's social order and propelled the city and its people into a state of uncertainty, "ambiguity," and "inclarity." But this state of limbo is a good thing, according to Bhabha, for it gives the city the opportunity to start from scratch and create new systems that help more people. In a state of twilight/limbo, he insists that people must rethink everything they took for granted and consider, consciously, how "we are projecting onto the event itself." That is, he wants people to consider how and why they might unwittingly gravitate toward policy and norms that benefit them, without any regard for how those norms harm others.

MAGIC #2

Smith interviews Betye Saar, an artist, who lives in Laurel Canyon. Saar describes the space between night and day that the sky inhabited as she and her companion, Tony, made plans for dinner. The unrest had already begun, and Tony, who was very political, predicted "trouble." Saar and Tony made their way toward West Hollywood but had trouble getting through the streets because of all the people. The area was mostly populated by the gay and lesbian community, and there were many gay men in the streets protesting the not-guilty verdict. Saar shifts her focus back to the sky, reaffirming its "surreal" quality. To her, **twilight** is a "sort of limbo time [...] because it's in transition." It's magical, though magic isn't necessarily a positive thing, since "evil / and control" are forms of magic, too.

Saar's observations expand on those Bhabha made in the previous scene. Saar, too, sees LA as existing in a state of limbo following the riots. However, while Bhabha saw hope and possibility amidst the uncertainty, Saar seems to adopt a more negative or ominous view of the situation. She associates twilight's ambiguity with magic, "evil / and control." Saar seems to suggest that LA has emerged from the crisis too helpless and vulnerable to undertake the task of rethinking and rebuilding its social infrastructure. She seems to suggest that it's more likely that the city will respond to the riots with fear and enhanced surveillance, not a fresh start and hope for the future.

SCREW THROUGH YOUR CHEST

Smith interviews Harland W. Braun, counsel for the defendant, Theodore Briseno. Harland recalls not wanting to take the case initially when he heard it was a racial attack, and his son had been involved in one in the past. Braun recounts this incident now. His son, now a student at Princeton, was going to Harvard boys' school at the time. He was riding in Westwood in a Mercedes; the driver was a friend whose mother is a partner at a law firm. It was a weekday night. An LAPD officer pulls them over.

Braun's story about his son's altercation with the police is oddly similar to Bill Bradley's earlier anecdote about his college friend. The parallels between these two accounts are evidence of the widespread problem of racial profiling among the LAPD.

Braun's son immediately accused the officer of pulling them over because Bobby (his friend who was driving) was Black. Since he's aware of Westwood's reputation, Braun suspects his son's accusation was likely true. But the officer attacked his son, ordering him to be quiet or he'd "put a screw through [his] chest." While the officer's actions infuriated Braun, he was also angry with his son for putting himself in danger by antagonizing the officer. After this incident, Braun didn't want to involve himself in the Rodney King case.

Braun's reticence to get involved with the Rodney King trial suggests he fears challenging the system. The police officer's threat to "put a screw through [Braun's son's] chest" suggests the dangers of challenging the LAPD and U.S. law enforcement more broadly. At the same time, acting as defense counsel for the system places Braun at the odds of public opinion, which was largely convinced of the officers' guilt in the King attack.

Braun comments on how disturbing it is to realize "how wrong you can be" in what you've learned "about an entire / historic event." For example, after the verdict was announced, even Bill Clinton announced that justice was served. "How does he know?" asks Braun, and "What does he mean by justice?" Still, Braun admits he'd probably think the same thing if he were in Clinton's shoes.

Braun's criticism of Bill Clinton challenges the idea that justice can be absolute and final. People want to believe that a guilty verdict for the police officers involved in King's attack has some meaning—that it signifies progress or an embrace of equality over racism. This is what Braun means when he asks, "What does he mean by justice?" He thinks people are projecting a lot of ideals and powers onto the notion of justice.

Braun poses a difficult question to Smith: would she rather see two innocent men convicted or fifty innocent people die? He revels in the "ambiguity" of this impossible choice. It's this sort of ambiguity that kept Braun from turning to his Bible much in constructing his arguments for the court, though he did reference the Bible in his closing statement. He used Pontius Pilate's trial of Christ, as depicted in Matthew, to show how Pilate reasonably claimed that the "rioting" Christ caused around the city made him a "public disorder." Elsewhere, in John, Pilate jokes, asking "What is truth?" Braun believes the same question is relevant to the King trials: is there truth in the fact that Koon and Powell are guilty, "or is it the truth of the society / that has to find them / guilty in order to protect itself?"

The ambiguity Braun finds in justice is similar to the ambiguity Bhabha and Saar found in twilight. His question of whether there is truth in Koon and Powell's guilty verdicts, or in "the society / that has to find them /guilty in order to protect itself" grapples with the meaning and function of justice in American society. What justice is served by convicting two men for a broader systemic problem? Braun implies that Koon and Powell's conviction is merely a symbol the justice system pulls out to calm the masses and distract the public from the real "truth," which is that very little will actually be done to ensure that the city's racial tensions and police corruption is actually dealt with.

SWALLOWING THE BITTERNESS

Smith interviews Mrs. Young-Soon Han, a former liquor store owner, in the woman's house on Sycamore Street in Los Angeles. Mrs. Young-Soon Han sits before the coffee table in her living room. She states that she no longer sees America as a land of possibility, as she is a "victim." Mrs. Han explains how America doesn't let its Korean immigrants participate in society and wonders why this is. Is it because they don't have political representation, or because they aren't fluent in English?

Mrs. Young-Soon Han's testimony offers a more in-depth analysis of the racial tensions that existed between LA's Korean American and Black populations in the late 20th century. Han takes issue with the media's lack of sympathy for Korean business owners, many of whom lost their stores to the riots. Despite this, the narrative the pushed by the media focused on the minority of Korean people who had weapons and fought back during the riots, suggesting that the Korean population as a whole had a racist-fueled vendetta against their Black neighbors. In calling herself a "victim," Mrs. Han suggests that the media has been so focused on construing Korean people as racist instigators that the losses they suffered in the riots and the broader injustices they suffer in daily life are forgotten.

Mrs. Han begins to punctuate her grievances by banging her hand, forcefully and rhythmically, against the coffee table. She says that Korean people can't get food stamps. They can't get welfare. In contrast, African American people who've never had a job qualify for these benefits. Why does America punish Korean people? she asks. Is it because they have a car, a house, and pay their taxes?

Mrs. Han's frustrations are complicated. On the one hand, her grievances about not being afforded the same rights as naturalized citizens are valid. However, she uses derogatory assumptions about LA's Black community to make her point, insinuating that many Black people are unemployed and reliant on government assistance. Her logic assumes that the benefits one minority group receives come at the direct cost of another.

Mrs. Han states that Black people might have felt that the trial represented a victory for them. She watched on TV, that Sunday, as Black people all across South-Central celebrated the righting of injustice. "Then where is the victims' rights?" she demands to know. What will justice do for the Korean shopkeepers whose stores and livelihoods were destroyed in the riots? Mrs. Han states that Dr. Martin King, with his emphasis on nonviolence, "is the only model for Black community."

Mrs. Han makes further reference to the media's skewed portrayal of the riots, which she argues placed Black oppression front and center, vilified the minority of Korean shopkeepers who took up arms to defend their businesses, and ignored the many Koreans who were hurt, killed, or robbed during the unrest. Mrs. Han continues to use an us vs. them thought process (Korean people vs. Black people) to argue her point. This keeps her from identifying what's actually oppressing both the Black and Korean communities in LA: a broken police system, an underfunded city infrastructure, and systemic racism.

Mrs. Han describes how watching the Black community celebrate was like "swallowing the bitternesseh." She almost felt happy for them, since at least someone who fought for justice was able to win. She also admits to "hav[ing] a lot of sympathy and understanding for them," and for other minorities. Still, while she wishes she could live alongside Black people, after the destruction of her store, she feels that the fire that was lit still can "burst out anytime."

Mrs. Han's closing remarks show that she does have a nuanced understanding of her and the Black community's standing as minorities in the U.S. She understands that they are both victims of an oppressive system who have long been denied justice and equal treatment under the law. It's for this reason that she feels "a lot of sympathy and understanding for them." Her apprehensions about living alongside Black people seems more an emotional response to the trauma of losing her store than inherent racism. Still, this suggests that it's easier to blame one's neighbor for one's hardships than a largely invisible and complicated legal system or government.

LUCIA

Smith interviews Gladis Sibrian, director of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front, USA. Siberian is a former nun from El Salvador who "became a revolutionary." Sibrian recalls being a teenager and being asked by her relatives how to bring about change to El Salvador, which was ruled by a military dictatorship for over half a century. One power that people possess, she suggests, is that of their "faith" and "convictions" that they can change things. Sibrian explains that people often accuse revolutionaries of being too "idealistic, / romantic."

Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front is one of El Salvador's two major political parties. The historically far-left party was one of the main participants in the Salvadoran Civil War (their opposition being the U.S.-backed Salvarodan government), which ended in 1992 with UN-mediated peace negotiations. Sibrian's involvement in a revolutionary movement gives her a unique perspective among Smith's subjects. Here, Sibrian emphasizes the central roles that having "faith" and "convictions" play in a revolutionary movement's success. Several of Smith's other subjects tend to criticize the 1992 riots as being overly beholden to "idealistic" or symbolic ideas, but Sibrian suggests that a core sense of idealism and a faith in the power of the people are needed, too. Essentially, she suggests that people need to believe in what they're fighting for, otherwise they'll have no reason to pursue the fight in the long term.

Sibrian sees the LA riots as a "social explosion," which is less "organized, planned" than a proper uprising. She sees the not-guilty verdict the court gave the police as the catalyst that jumpstarted this explosion. At the same time, the "anarchical" quality of the ensuing protests saddened Sibrian, who felt that so many people didn't need to die. Furthermore, since the riots, there's been a distinct lack of hope for the future in Los Angeles. Sibrian attributes this hopelessness to people's inability to see the power to enact change within themselves.

Sibrian expands on the connection between idealism and pragmatism in revolutionary movements. She argues that the idealism that inspired participants in the 1992 riots had an "anarchical" quality and wasn't backed by "organized, planned" forces, which was why the riots ultimately failed and fell short of a proper political uprising. As she sees it, this poor planning shattered people's hopes that they were capable of inciting change, which hurt their motivation to organize.

LIMBO/TWILIGHT #2

Smith interviews Twilight Bey, organizer of the gang truce. They meet in a Denny's restaurant in February of 1993. Twilight explains the origins of his name: when was a young boy, he'd stay out until the sun came up. He acted as a "watchdog," ensuring no rivals entered his neighborhood. Additionally, people would tell him he had "more wisdom than those / twice [his] age." One night, while he was at home writing, he replaced the "ce" at the end of "twice" and found "**twilight**." He notes how light symbolizes knowledge and wisdom in the Koran and the Bible. He also notes how twilight conveys a sense of "limbo," which he associates with people always telling him he was "before [his] time." When Twilight first broached the idea of a truce in 1988, nobody believed it would happen. Yet, in 1992, it did.

Twilight Bey is the namesake for Smith's play. His analysis of the "limbo" quality of twilight resonates with Homi Bhabha and Betye Saar's monologues in Act Four. His ability to be "before [his] time" and imagine new ways of being and new social orders aligns with Bhabha's argument, which is that twilight and uncertainty gives people the opportunity to completely break with past social structures and invent and organize new, improved structures.

Twilight Bey continues to meditate on being "stuck in limbo." He feels "like the sun is stuck between night and day." Unlike a lot of people, Twilight doesn't associate nighttime or darkness with negativity. He sees it as "what was first." He describes seeing "darkness as [him]self" and "light as knowledge [...] of the world." He asserts that "to be a true human being," one must bridge this divide between darkness and lightness, between self and world.

Twilight Bey's belief that one has to move beyond oneself "to be a true human being" resonates with the play's insistence that it's necessary to transcend racial and class boundaries to work toward a more equal world. Essentially, he suggests people must be less selfish and more curious about other people, or nothing will change.

Twilight Bey feels as though he never sleeps. Late at night, he watches young kids beating an old man. He scolds them, asking why they're out doing this and aren't at home, where they belong. During the day, he sees "the living dead," people who are severely addicted to crack-cocaine. Seeing the "living dead" makes Twilight understand that "what goes in the daytime creates at night."

Twilight sees the young children who run around committing acts of violence at night and "the living dead" who are addicted to crack-cocaine by day as part of a connected system that feeds off itself: this is what he means when he states, "what goes in the daytime creates the night." Twilight—the limbo time between night and day, darkness and light—is critical because it's where a person can step in and break this cycle of violence, trauma, and oppression.

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