

# Next Act Examines the L.A. Riots from All Angles in 'Twilight'

By Evan Rytlewski

Feb. 1, 2016



Photo by Ross Zentner

In April 1992, deadly riots erupted across Los Angeles following the acquittal of four policemen videotaped beating an unarmed Rodney King. That's the quick version of the story, at least, but playwright Anna Deavere Smith takes a far wider view in *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, detailing not only the King beating, the riots and their aftermath, but also the long-simmering racial tensions that primed the city for such violence.

Told through monologues pulled verbatim from real interviews with the riot's victims, perpetrators and bystanders, Next Act Theatre's production of the drama trusts the stories of 37 people to a cast of just six actors, who seem downright invigorated by the challenge. Even when they're tasked with characters of different races and genders, the actors embody their roles so convincingly that it's never a distraction.

In the show's most suspenseful vignette, Andrew Perez voices a pregnant woman struck by a

stray bullet. Ryan Schabach gets several particularly meaty roles, including acquitted officer Ted Briseno, an anonymous juror grappling with the explosive reaction to the verdict he helped render, and truck driver Reginald Denny, whose assault at the hands of rioters was caught on tape in a gruesome (and heavily politicized) echo of the King video. There are moments of levity, too: Marti Gobel is a hoot as Elaine Young, an eccentric realtor to the stars who followed the riots from the safety of a posh Beverly Hills hotel.

No perspective is given more weight than any others. *Twilight* also shares the voices of Korean store-owners, gang members, looters, politicians, yuppies, and activists. If anything, at two and a half hours long the show is almost too inclusive, and too easily sidetracked, but that's also part of its charm. The show isn't only interested in big themes of race and justice. It's also fundamentally fascinated by people: their backgrounds, their values, the way they think out loud and the rhythms of their speech. In the hands of a cast this locked in, even the most tangential monologues are a joy to watch.