

GUIDE TO
Twilight
LOS ANGELES



CONCEIVED, WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY
ANNA DEAVERE SMITH

DIRECTED BY **MARC LEVIN**



www.facinghistory.org

FACING HISTORY AND OURSELVES is a national educational and teacher training organization whose mission is to engage students of diverse backgrounds in an examination of racism, prejudice, and antisemitism in order to promote the development of a more humane and informed citizenry. By studying the historical development and lessons of the Holocaust and other examples of genocide, students make the essential connection between history and the moral choices they confront in their own lives.

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Twilight

LOS ANGELES

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To obtain VHS copies of *Twilight: Los Angeles*, please contact:

PBS VIDEO
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Contents

Introduction	4
<hr/>	
by Anna Deavere Smith	
Preface	6
<hr/>	
by Margot Stern Strom	
PreView	8
<hr/>	
History and Identity	9
Membership and Community	12
Race and Racism	17
Challenging “Stereotypes, Rumor, and Fear”	22
“Invisible” Communities	28
“Squeezed Between Black and White”	32
Conflict in the Promised Land	37
Riots, Then and Now	42
Viewing <i>Twilight: Los Angeles</i>	45
<hr/>	
Map	45
Remembering the “Los Angeles Riots”	46
Timeline	50
List of Characters <i>Twilight: Los Angeles</i>	52
Responding to <i>Twilight: Los Angeles</i>	54
PostView	55
<hr/>	
Do videos “tell all”?	55
“Fifty years ago”	56
“No justice; no peace”	57
“A roar”	58
“Burning down their own neighborhoods”	59
“Where are the leaders?”	59
Who was on trial in Los Angeles in 1992?	60
What prompts some to help a stranger? Why do others look away?	60
When do <i>they</i> become one of <i>us</i> ?	61
Why do we have to be left out?	62
“To be a true human being...”	63
“I’m gonna have a room...”	64

Facing History and Ourselves has resources at www.facinghistory.org for *Twilight: Los Angeles*. If you or your students would like to use these materials or participate in an on-line discussion, contact your regional Facing History office or info@facing.org.

Introduction

In May 1992 I was commissioned by the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles to create a one-woman performance piece about the civil disturbances in that city the month before. *Twilight: Los Angeles* is the product of my search for the character of the city in the wake of the verdict in the first trial of the police officers accused in the beating of Rodney King—which, depending on your point of view, would be variously referred to as a “riot,” an “uprising,” and/or a “rebellion.”

I have been particularly interested in how the events in Los Angeles give us an opportunity to take stock of the changing racial landscape in America. Since the 1992 riots, our attitudes about race have shifted. As the character Twilight Bey indicates to us, we are in “a twilight,” that time between day and night. Part of perceiving the light is seeing race as more than a black-and-white picture.

Where do theater and film fit into this? Theater and film can participate in civic discourse and even influence national attitudes by using the power of entertainment, spectacle, and dialogue. At a time when our national conversation about race has become, to some extent, merely fragments of monologues, *Twilight: Los Angeles* seeks to create a conversation from these fragments. It seeks to be a part of that conversation.

Creating *Twilight* was a particular challenge, because of the number and the diversity of the voices I gathered through interviews. I developed *Twilight* with the help of four other people of various races who functioned as dramaturges (a dramaturge is a person who assists in the preparation of the text of a play and can offer an outside perspective to those who are more active in the process of staging the play). These dramaturges brought their own real-world experience with race to bear on the work. They reacted to *Twilight* at every stage of its development.

My predominant concern about the creation of *Twilight* was that my own history, which is a history of race as a black and white struggle, would make the work narrower than it should be. For this reason, I sought out dramaturges who had very developed careers and identities outside the theater profession. I was interested not only in their ethnic diversity but also in their professional diversity.

Among the people I asked to join me were Dorinne Kondo, a Japanese American anthropologist and feminist scholar; Hector Tobar, a Guatemalan American reporter from the *Los Angeles Times*, and the African American poet and professor Elizabeth Alexander. Oskar Eustis, who is white and a resident director at the Mark Taper Theater, also joined the dramaturgical team. Many of our meetings were very emotional. They were dramas in and of themselves. The most outspoken members of the group were Dorinne and

Hector. They passionately attacked the black-and-white canvas that most of us in the room were inclined to perpetuate.

In the end, *Twilight* is a document of what I, as an actress, heard in Los Angeles. In creating a “social drama,” I am not proposing a specific solution to social problems. I turn that over to activists, scholars, legislators, and most importantly, to you, the audience. As an actress, I am exploring the process of becoming something that I am not—the process of walking in someone else’s shoes. Laws and legislation can create a context in which we can work toward better relations with one another. Yet laws are limited in their ability to teach us how to move from an individual position to a larger community.

We need to reach for the core of our humanity with all its glory and all its challenges. I am seeking to illuminate something about humanness. The solutions lie not in my monologues but in the collaborative humanness of audience members who walk out of the theater with the potential to make change.

You anticipate me before the curtain goes up; I anticipate you as the curtain goes down. I await your dialogue, your dramatic action. *Twilight* has been created specifically to encourage dialogue across lines of power and race. More importantly, it has been created to encourage you to act and to move us further along on our American journey to get to “We the people.” Here is a place to start: Use the experience of seeing this film and the thoughts it evoked to start a conversation with someone whose race and social class are different from yours.

Anna Deavere Smith

Adapted from an essay by Anna Deavere Smith on the making of her stage piece *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, which is the basis for the film.

Preface

When you work with Anna Deavere Smith, you work with an artist and a teacher. Her art is as much about the creative process as it is about the production itself. She wants to establish a relationship with her audiences so that the conversations that follow the performance become part of the work. For her, as for a Facing History teacher, participation in the process of democracy begins only when we seek to understand one another.

To Anna Deavere Smith, *Twilight: Los Angeles* is a tragedy. It is a crisis of community to some; a riot to others, a war or an “urban explosion” to still others. It is linked to other outbursts of violence in our nation’s history. Yet it is contemporary, linked most recently to the explosion in Cincinnati in 2001.

In 1992, a nation listened to the verdict in the first trial of the Los Angeles police officers indicted for the beating of Rodney King. That beating was broadcast throughout the nation and around the world. All who watched became witnesses. In the hours that followed the acquittal, acts of violence erupted in Los Angeles and angry words of rage were expressed by friends and strangers everywhere. Journalist Richard Rodriguez said of the violence, “It was the worst moment for Los Angeles. It was also the first moment, I think, when most people in L.A. realized they were part of the whole. The city that the world mocked for not being a city, for lacking a center, having only separate suburbs, separate freeway exits—L.A. realized that it was interconnected.”

Americans—not only those in the streets but also millions of others who watched on TV—saw rioters drag Reginald Denny from his truck at the corner of Florence and Normandie and beat him. Facing History resource speaker and author Greg Alan-Williams has written about a similar moment when he and others stepped forward to save a life. When students view *Twilight: Los Angeles*, they ask: Why didn’t more people try to stop the violence? Why didn’t more help? They ask about the causes of the rage and relate stories of injustice and discrimination from their own experiences.

Anna Deavere Smith’s *Twilight: Los Angeles* directed by Marc Levin examines the event from a variety of perspectives. She has collected fragments of monologues that both invite and provoke conversation. Together they raise questions about race, power, truth, and justice. They reveal how myths, misinformation, and misunderstanding can lead not only to prejudice and stereotyping but also violence. “Strangers turned against strangers” energized by rumor, propaganda, rage, and for some, a sort of mindless entertainment—an outlet for misplaced energy and anger. Their experiences deepen our understanding of the importance of listening to one another’s stories and to understanding one another’s point of view.

But listening is not enough. Although the looting and burning damaged nine out of every ten Korean-owned businesses in South Central Los Angeles, the tragedy lay in the deaths of 51 human beings.

This study guide, both in print and on our website—facinghistory.org—is designed to help teachers and students discuss the difficult and controversial issues raised by the film. It suggests the complexities of Los Angeles’s history or that of any other community in crisis. It also reveals the importance to a democracy of the kind of education that equips students to negotiate those complexities.

For years, Facing History and Ourselves has been asking what holds a community together. What does it mean to be a good neighbor? To be a good citizen in a democracy? Facing History and Ourselves explores answers to those questions throughout its work. In one resource, a series of television programs on creativity, journalist Bill Moyers profiles poet Maya Angelou who as a child was silent until a neighbor helped her find her voice. He says of Angelou and others like her, “In classrooms and in schools everywhere, the urge to create is lying in each [child] like a seed in the spring soil.” In how many, he wonders, will the ground “never be touched by the season’s warmth.” He goes on to say, “I think it is true, as wiser men than I have noted, that the suppression of this life within us lies at the base of so much of today’s waste, violence and mindless cruelty, for the artist, the craftsman, is not necessarily the more gifted among us but the more fortunate.”

Like Bill Moyers, Anna Deavere Smith and Facing History regard the creative act as the ability to connect self to others. This guide is designed to explore our capacity for empathy. “It is not a scientifically certifiable fact that each child born into the world comes with the potential to create,” observes Moyers. “It is rather a statement of faith. But I can’t imagine any declaration more important to make.” Neither can we.

Margot Stern Strom, Executive Director
Facing History and Ourselves

PreView

History...is not merely something to be read. And it does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do.

James Baldwin

Just after midnight on a Sunday in March of 1991, the sound of sirens and the noise of a helicopter awoke George Holliday. He looked out his bedroom window and saw police cars with flashing lights and a black man surrounded by officers. He grabbed his home video camera and stepped out on his balcony to record what he saw: Los Angeles police officers beating Rodney King. Many Americans were outraged as they watched the videotape played and replayed on TV. A year later, they found it impossible to believe that a predominately white jury had acquitted the four officers accused of the assault. On April 29, 1992, the day the verdict was announced, a number of young African Americans in Los Angeles took to the streets to express their anger at the verdict. They set off fires, beat motorists, and looted stores and offices. This “urban explosion” resulted in 51 deaths—26 African Americans, 14 Latinos, eight whites, two Asians, and one unknown—and property losses of nearly \$1 billion. Nine out of every ten businesses owned by Koreans in South Central Los Angeles were damaged. The violence that shook the city attracted worldwide attention.

Anna Deavere Smith’s *Twilight: Los Angeles* tells the story of the “Los Angeles riots” from a variety of perspectives. Smith performs dozens of different characters, each a real person—a witness to some aspect of the story. Using a tape-recorder, she interviewed over 300 individuals “all of whom would have gone,” she writes, “to the highest mountain to tell their stories to anyone in the world who would listen.” She turned their words into a play in which she recreates their stories verbatim, leaving intact their hesitations, asides, even pauses. The result is a powerful account of a community in crisis—one that illuminates many of the issues that divide both the city and the nation—issues related to history and identity, community and membership, race and racism, and justice and peace.

The readings in the PreView section provide a historical context for *Twilight: Los Angeles*. The choices people made in Los Angeles and the nation in the spring of 1992 were shaped in large part by the past. Each reading also focuses on one or more of the issues that are central to the film. Together they reveal why even though the history of Los Angeles is a particular story, its lessons apply to every community and have meaning for every American.



Ranching was central to life in Los Angeles in the late 1700s and early 1800s.

History and Identity

Every community has a story to tell about how it came to be. That history is celebrated at community events, taught in textbooks, and memorialized in monuments and museums. This story about the founding of Los Angeles is taken from the Los Angeles County website:

When the Spanish occupation of California began in 1769, an exploratory expedition of more than 60 persons led by Gaspar de Portola moved north through the area now known as Los Angeles. They camped by a river where fertile soil and availability of water for irrigation impressed members of the party. Father Juan Crespi, who accompanied the group saw the location as having all the requirements for a large settlement. He named the river El Rio de Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Angeles de Porciúncula, which means “The River of Our Lady the Queen of the Angels of Porciuncula.”

In September 1771 Father Junipero Serra and a group of Spaniards founded the San Gabriel Mission as the center of the first “community” in an area inhabited by small bands of Gabrielino Indians.

Twelve years after Portola’s trek, which began in San Diego and ended in Monterey, a company of settlers called “Los Pobladores” were recruited in the states of Sonora and Sinaloa in Mexico. Their mission, under the authority of Governor Felipe de Neve, was to establish pueblos in the name of the king of Spain.

On September 4, 1781, the Pobladores, a group of 12 families—46 men, women and children led by Captain Rivera y Moncada—established a community in the area discovered by Portola, and named it El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Angeles de Porciúncula, after the nearby river. Over time, the area became known as the Ciudad de Los Angeles, “City of the Angels,” and on April 4, 1850 became the City of Los Angeles.

California was ruled by Spain until 1822 when Mexico assumed jurisdiction. After a two-year period of hostilities with Mexico beginning in 1846, the area came under U.S. control. In 1848 the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo made California a United States territory.

The County of Los Angeles was established on February 18, 1850 as one of the 27 original counties, several months before California was admitted to the Union. It derived its name from the area known as Los Angeles,

already a large community, and made it the designated “seat” of County government.

On April 1, 1850 the people of Los Angeles County asserted their newly won right of self-government and elected a three-man Court of Sessions as their first governing body. A total of 377 votes were cast in this election. In 1852 the Legislature dissolved the Court of Sessions and created a five-member Board of Supervisors. In 1913 the citizens of Los Angeles County approved a charter recommended by a board of freeholders which gave the County greater freedom to govern itself within the framework of state law.

The story told on the county website is part of the city’s official history. Like all histories, it emphasizes some events, downplays others, and omits still others. In 1948, historian Carey McWilliams expressed concern about some details that are often left out of the story:

The city boasts of the Spanish origin of its first settlers. Here are their names: Pablo Rodriguez, Jose Variegas, Jose Moreno, Felix Villavicencio, Jose de Lara, Antonio Mesa, Basilio Rosas, Alejandro Rosas, Antonio Navarro, and Manuel Camero. All “Spanish” names, all good “Spaniards” except—Pablo Rodriguez who was an Indian; Jose Variegas, first [mayor] of the pueblo, also an Indian; Jose Moreno, a mulatto [of European and African descent]; Felix Villavicencio, a Spaniard married to an Indian; Jose de Lara, also married to an Indian; Antonio Navarro, a mestizo [of Spanish and Indian ancestry] with a mulatto wife; and Manuel Camero, a mulatto. The twelfth settler is merely listed as “a Chino” and was probably of Chinese descent. Thus of the original settlers of Our City the Queen of the Angels, their wives included, two were Spaniards; one mestizo; two were Negroes¹; eight were mulattoes; and nine were Indians. None of that would matter...except that Mexicans are still not accepted as part of the community.²

Nearly 50 years later, Cecil L. Murray, the pastor of the Los Angeles’s oldest African American church, reached a similar conclusion. He told a reporter, “Forty-six founders of Los Angeles, 42 of them were Native Americans and African Americans. Pico Boulevard is named after the last territorial governor of this territory—he was black. So we are part and parcel of this community.”³

Working in small groups, tell the story of the founding of Los Angeles from a perspective different from the one on the website. What information would you like to highlight in your account? What might you add? Share your version with your classmates. What do all of the versions have in common? How do you account for differences? How important are those differences to our understanding of the story?



McWilliams writes that the additions he made to the story of Los Angeles's founding would not matter except that "Mexicans are still not accepted as part of the community." Nearly 50 years later, Murray makes the same point—not about Mexican Americans but about African Americans. Why does it matter who is included in the story and who is not? What does it mean to be left out of a story as important as the history of one's community?



What is the story of your community?
Where do you go to learn that story?

¹ The words *Negro* and *Negroes* were commonly used in earlier centuries to refer to individuals of African descent. Its use reflects a particular time period.

² *North from Mexico* by Carey McWilliams. Greenwood Press, 1948, 1968, 36.

³ Quoted in "Cecil Murray: A Voice of Reason in Times of Trouble" by Robert Scheer. *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 1992. Copyright ©1992 Los Angeles Times.

Membership and Community

In 1848, California became a part of the United States as a result of a war with Mexico. Many Americans saw the new territory as proof of the nation's "manifest destiny." The phrase, coined in 1845, refers to a belief that the mission of the United States is to rule all of North America from "sea to shining sea." As one congressman at the time explained, "This continent was intended by Providence as a vast theatre on which to work out the grand experiment of republican government under the auspices of the Anglo-Saxon race." That belief was central to the way Americans viewed California and other parts of the West as well as to the way they defined citizenship in the territories they acquired. That belief also shaped how cities like Los Angeles and states like California developed and grew.

In 1849, 48 delegates from communities throughout the territory met in Monterey to write a state constitution. Most of the delegates were from the United States, but the convention also included a few Mexicans. The group quickly agreed that slavery would not be permitted in the state. Then they confronted the question of who could be a citizen. Would citizenship be open to everyone who lived in California, including former slaves? Or would it be limited to white Americans? Would Mexicans whose families had lived in cities like Los Angeles for generations be accepted as citizens? Should Indians be granted citizenship? The gold rush was bringing thousands of people from countries around the world to northern California. Should they all be allowed to become citizens?

Noriega de la Guerra, a native Californian, argued against using skin color to determine citizenship. He told the delegates through an interpreter, "Many citizens have received from nature a very dark skin; nonetheless there are among them men who have heretofore [under the Mexican government] been allowed to vote, and not only that, but to fill the highest public offices. It would be very unjust to deprive them of the privilege of citizenship because nature did not make them white." A Mr. Potts replied that he was willing to use any words anyone preferred as long as they excluded the "African and Indian races" from citizenship. In the end, the delegates gave full citizenship to white male citizens of the United States and Mexico who resided in California.¹

Many white Americans believed that the nation's victory in the war with Mexico gave them the right to land in the state. Yet to their dismay, when they arrived in California, they found that Mexicans already owned most of the best land. In 1851, the state legislature, which was dominated by white Americans, passed a law requiring that Mexican landowners prove that they really owned the land they claimed. On average, it took a landowner about

17 years to establish a clear title to his or her land. While claims were under review, landowners could not sell their property or profit from it. They could not even evict the squatters who staked claim to parts of the land in the hope that the original title would be overturned. Yet Mexican landowners were still required to pay property taxes and lawyers' fees. As a result, even those who eventually won their case in court had to sell all or most of their holdings to settle their debts.

Mexicans in California were furious. Throughout southern California some banded together to harass the newcomers. Americans called these Mexicans "bandits." The "bandits" had a different view. One man recalled, "I had numerous fights in defense of what I believed to be my rights and those of my countrymen. I believed we were being unjustly deprived of the social rights that belong to us." As tensions mounted, Americans in Los Angeles and other southern California towns saw themselves as living in a state of siege. Amid constant rumors of invasions by recently displaced Mexicans, some of these Americans formed "vigilance committees" and administered their own form of justice. By 1854, officials in Los Angeles were reporting a homicide a day with most of the victims Mexicans or Indians.

Historian Leonard Pitt writes that "vigilante justice" was distinctive in Los Angeles, because "every important lynch-law episode and most minor ones involved the Spanish-speaking."² Historian Richard Griswold del Castillo notes that even in court Mexicans were treated differently than other Americans. A white or Anglo American found guilty of murder was often sentenced to a year in jail and served about 70 days, while a Mexican convicted of "disorderly conduct" spent 90 days in jail. There were other differences as well. California allowed only whites to testify in court. Some judges interpreted the law to mean that Mexicans could not testify, because they had "Indian blood." A short time later, those same judges decided that the Chinese ought to be excluded as well. After all, they too were "not white."

By 1871, vigilantes in Los Angeles were also turning their attention to Chinese immigrants. The result was the city's first "race riot." The violence began after a white police officer was shot while investigating a quarrel between two Chinese. A rumor spread quickly through the city that the Chinese were "killing whites wholesale." An angry mob of white Americans along with a few Mexicans stormed the Chinese section of the city and lynched at least 19 people—over 10 percent of the city's Chinese population.

Horace Bell, a witness to the violence, later wrote that some in the city claim "that it was the underworld part of our population that took advantage of the situation to start indiscriminate killing and pillaging. But they do not state that the police force of the city furnished the leaders of the mob; that the Chief of Police of Los Angeles stationed his policemen and the deputies he had

By 1854, officials in Los Angeles were reporting a homicide a day with most of the victims Mexicans or Indians.

mustered in for the occasion, at all strategic points with orders to shoot to death any Chinese that might ‘stick a head out or attempt to escape from the besieged building;’ nor that one of the leading members of the City Council participated in the slaughter.”³

After investigating the incident, a grand jury indicted 150 men for “murderous assault,” but only six were convicted and each spent just a little over a year in prison.

“To the Anglo Americans, the barrio seemed to be a sleepy Mexican village, quaintly placed in the middle of their booming frontier city.”

Gradually white Americans took control of Los Angeles. Mexicans, Indians, and Chinese in the city found themselves beyond the larger community’s “universe of obligation”—the circle of individuals and groups toward whom others in the community have obligations, to whom the rules of society apply, and whose injuries call for amends. By the 1880s, writes Richard Griswold del Castillo, most Mexicans in Los Angeles lived “within a well-defined adobe enclave surrounded by wood-framed Anglo American suburbs. To the Anglo Americans, the barrio seemed to be a sleepy Mexican village, quaintly placed in the middle of their booming frontier city. They did not see that it was partially the creation of their own economic and social prejudice.”⁴ The few Chinese who remained in the city also had their own neighborhood, as did a few Indians and African Americans.

What does the term *manifest destiny* mean? How did it shape the way the nation viewed neighboring countries like Mexico and Canada in the mid-1800s? How did it shape the way Americans saw the people and the lands they acquired as a result of the nation's *manifest destiny*?



In 1776, soon after the American Revolution began, each of the 13 colonies wrote a constitution that gave the right to vote only to “free men” who owned property. By the mid-1800s, most states had revised their constitutions to allow all “free white men” to vote. How was land ownership in California linked to citizenship? To political power? Why do you think Americans felt that they had a right to the best land? To what extent is land ownership linked to political power today?

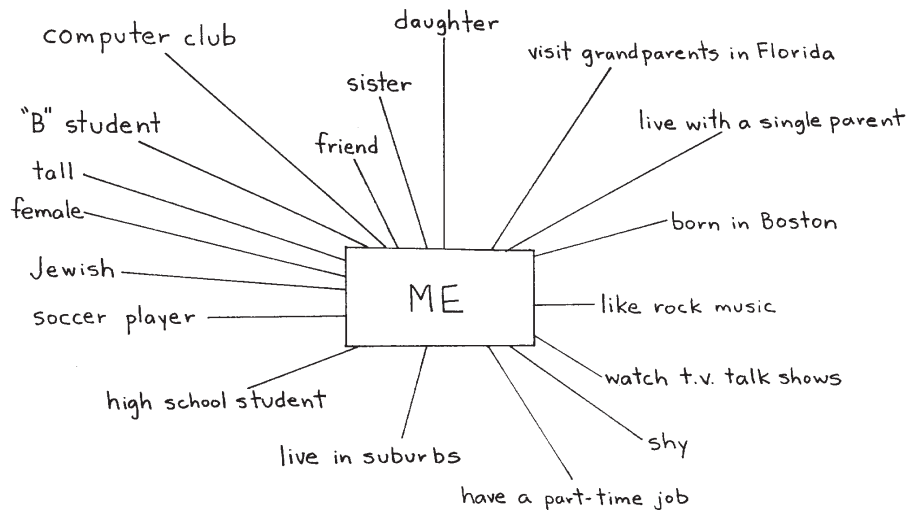


It has been said that the most important issue for framers of a new constitution is citizenship. Who was considered a citizen of California in 1850? Which newcomers could become citizens? What does it mean to be denied citizenship? To be viewed as an “alien,” an “outsider,” a “stranger”? Why do you think non-citizens are particularly vulnerable to prejudice and discrimination?



In Los Angeles in the late 1800s, race determined who belonged and who did not. It shaped identity. One way to look at identity is by constructing

an identity chart. The diagram below is an example of such a chart. It contains the words or phrases people attach to themselves as well as the ones that society gives them.



Create an identity chart for yourself. Begin with the words or phrases that you use to describe yourself. Then add the labels that others attach to you. You may wish to include the various groups to which you belong as well as events that have shaped your identity. After you have completed your chart, compare and contrast it with those of your classmates. Find at least three links between your chart and theirs. How important are those connections? To what other individuals or groups is your identity linked?



To be *vigilant* is to be alert. To what were vigilance committees alert? Whose rights did they seek to protect? In *vigilante justice*, the same individuals serve as sheriff, judge,

jury, and executioner. Why do you think some people claimed that when vigilantes spoke of justice, they meant “just-us”? How did vigilance committees define their universe of obligation? What were the consequences of that definition?

What is the difference between a “bandit” and a “vigilante”? How do the labels we place on one another shape attitudes and perceptions?



Like individuals, communities and even nations have identities. Use the information in this reading to create an identity chart for Los Angeles in the 1850s. Include the words or phrases the city uses to describe itself as well as the ones that others attach to it. Add to the chart as you read this guide and watch the film *Twilight: Los Angeles*.



Use an American history textbook to create an identity chart for the United States in the mid-1800s. Whom did Americans consider part of their universe of obligation? Who was outside that universe?

The words *community* and *communicate* both come from a Latin word that means “to make public or common.” What role does communication play in the building of a community? In keeping a community together? Was Los Angeles in the late 1800s a community? If so, who was part of that community?



As you read, you may encounter words you know but have difficulty explaining. Try to develop working definitions for those words. A working definition is one that builds to include more and more information.

Community: A group of people who live near one another

A group that is part of one’s universe of obligation

Society as a whole; the public

What other words or phrases would you add to a working definition of *community*?



Based on your working definition of a community, list all of the communities to which you belong. What do you have in common with other members of these communities? What responsibilities or obligations does membership involve?

¹ Quoted in *One Drop of Blood* by Scott L. Malcolmson. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2000, 296-297.

² *The Seven States of California* by Philip L. Fradkin. Henry Holt, 1995, 367.

³ Quoted in *An Island on the Land* by Carey McWilliams. Meredith Press, 1946, 91-92.

⁴ Reprinted by permission of the publishers from *Blue Dreams* by Nancy Abelmann and John Lie, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Copyright ©1995 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

Race and Racism

In the 1870s the first trains rolled into Los Angeles. In the decade that followed, the city's population grew almost sixfold, from about 11,000 people in 1880 to over 60,000 by 1890. During that boom, one Los Angeles resident noted, "Here were 40,000 or 50,000 people suddenly gathered together from all parts of the Union, in utter ignorance of one another's previous history."¹

In the years that followed, Los Angeles's population continued to grow by leaps and bounds. Most of the newcomers were white Americans, but the new arrivals also included African Americans as well as immigrants from Mexico, Japan, and countries in Southern and Eastern Europe. Each came with not only a history and a culture but also a dream—of owning land, opening a business, building a home, and educating children.

Looking north along Fort Street—later called Broadway—ca. 1869.



Journalist Harry Carr was among the many thousands who moved to Los Angeles during those years. He came as a child in 1887 from a small town in Iowa. In 1935, he hailed the migration of his family and other "Iowans" as "one of the most remarkable racial movements in the history of the world." He goes on to say:

Not even the Normans over-running England or the Spanish conquest of Mexico made a more profound change in the psychology of an invaded land than did the Iowans make in Los Angeles. I say "Iowans" as a generic term for the immigrants from the Middle West. They were not all from one state.



They plastered the town with Protestant churches where only Catholic bells had tolled. They built what were beyond doubt or apology the ugliest houses that any architect ever erected. ... But they made a sleepy little Mexican pueblo over into a great city. They junked a tumble-down system of water ditches and turned two mountain rivers into the pipes—to squirt water onto Middle West front lawns....

They clawed up the mud ... at San Pedro and made of it a harbor that does more export business than the harbor of New York.

They punched holes into the gizzard of Mother Earth and made this one of the great oil-producing sections of the world.

The good land going to waste made their fingers itch for a plow. Land, that under the easy-going, leisurely methods of the Californians had taken fourteen acres to feed a cow, was belabored until now Los Angeles county stands at the head of all the counties in the world in the value of farm production.

They came from little jerk-water towns where the train stopped on flag signal only; but they could see big.

They made Los Angeles a going concern.²

In reflecting on the way each new group of arrivals boosted the city's economy and encouraged more newcomers, another Californian noted:

The constant stream of people seeking new homes in a mild climate would alone be sufficient to keep Southern California prosperous. They must be housed, which attracts thousands of skilled mechanics; both the new residents and the house builders swell the trade of grocery, dry goods, and furniture stores, of garages, cafeterias, and bootleggers, of shoe dealers, chile-con-carne parlors, dairies, and electric lines. These enterprises, in turn, need more employees to wait on their customers, more power to light the stores and run the cars, more paper to advertise, more lawyers to collect the bills, etc., until for every new resident drawing an income from the old farm in Iowa there are three or four workers to look after his needs.³

According to Carr and others, Los Angeles grew so quickly that new developments were opened “on every boundary of the town in every direction.” Before long, some builders were laying out brand new towns just outside city limits. More than 60 were started in 1887 alone. About half of them were along rail lines; the rest were “not on anything—not even a map.”

Although a few of these boomtowns became ghost towns, most were huge successes, including Riverside built in 1886, Hollywood in 1887, and later Glendale, Burbank, and many others.

By the 1920s, Los Angeles was a “land of opportunity” not only for “Iowans” but also for moviemakers, oil drillers, and producers of everything from airplanes to clothing. By the end of the decade, Los Angeles was the largest city in the West and the most racially diverse. It was also the most segregated. Most of the new communities that sprang up in and around the city were open only to “white Americans.” Indeed some were open only to “white Christian Americans.”

Segregation in Los Angeles was not a matter of law. Instead it was written into contracts—particularly those that involved the transfer of real estate. When someone bought a house, the deed often contained a clause that stated “no part of said premises shall ever, at any time, be sold, conveyed, leased or rented to any person of African, Mexican, Chinese, or Japanese descent.” That clause helped build a “white wall” around much of the city. In areas that were not legally bound by deed restrictions, white homeowners often banded together to form “protective associations.” Often the first order of business was the establishment of a “block restriction”—an agreement to keep minorities from moving onto a particular block or into a neighborhood. Whenever Mexican and African Americans challenged those restrictions, they were upheld by California courts.

By the late 1920s, 95 percent of the city’s housing stock was restricted. As a result, Mexican, African, and Asian Americans were crowded into a few sections of the city where they competed for housing, jobs, and services. These communities were in the poorest sections of the city and often lacked the services that other city residents enjoyed. Yet, writes Richard Griswold del Castillo, these neighborhoods “gave identity and a feeling of being at home for the dispossessed and poor. It was a place, a traditional place, that offered some security from the city’s social and economic turmoil.”⁴

No matter where they came from, newcomers, including the “Iowans,” organized into groups soon after their arrival. They established mutual aid societies; churches, synagogues, and mosques; political organizations, cultural associations, special schools, social clubs, and newspapers. Each helped make life a little easier and more comfortable—more like “home.” A Japanese woman who arrived at the turn of the 20th century later recalled, “When I first came here, I never thought that I was in America. Everything was the same as in my small home in Japan. We [all] knew each other.”⁵

What did it mean to be invisible? To live among people who were ignorant of your history and your culture—your way of life?

To outsiders, only the white neighborhoods were visible. That may explain why in a city where one out of every five residents was Mexican, Charles P. Bayer of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce could declare in 1926, “We do not have a varied group of different kinds of nationalities in southern California.” In 1930, readers of the *Saturday Evening Post* were told that residents of Los Angeles were “native Americans almost in total.” Journalist Joseph Lilly wrote in the *North American Review*, that despite a large Mexican population, Los Angeles was “peculiarly ‘white’ in the composition of its population.” He added that the city is “an interesting experiment for the Anglo-Saxon in America.”⁶

What did it mean to be invisible? To live among people who were ignorant of your history and your culture—your way of life? In the 1930s Mexican Americans found out. Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, the city’s white business leaders had encouraged Mexicans to come to the city. Their labor was needed to build aqueducts, highways, and other public improvements. Their labor was also needed in the factories and on nearby farms. Then in 1929, a worldwide depression began to slow economic activity.

In the midst of the depression, the Los Angeles coordinator for a federal unemployment relief agency read in his morning newspaper that 400,000 foreign nationals could be deported from the United States at a moment’s notice if the government chose to do so. After estimating that about 20,000 of them lived in his district, the coordinator sent a telegram to Washington volunteering to have the foreigners rounded up and deported by local police. He told his supervisors, “We need their jobs for needy citizens.” His supervisors agreed. Almost immediately between 3000 and 4000 Mexicans, many of them United States citizens, were picked up and held without legal counsel before being shipped to Mexico. The raids continued until 1939, when the economy picked up again.

Why did so many people move to Los Angeles in the 1800s and early 1900s? What were their dreams? How important was home ownership to those dreams? What did newcomers find in the city?



How important is it to know your own history? Your neighbor's history? What does it mean to live in a community where "40,000 or 50,000 people suddenly gathered together from all parts of the union, in utter ignorance of one another's previous history"?



What is the purpose of a "protective association"? Against what danger are homeowners protecting themselves? What do such associations suggest about the way many people in Los Angeles defined their "universe of obligation"—the circle of individuals and groups toward whom we have obligations, to whom the rules of society apply, and whose injuries call for amends? What is the link between not knowing that history and establishing a "protective association"?

Mexican Americans were one of several minorities living in a community where 95 percent of the housing is closed to them. What does it mean to live in a community where most of the city is open only to "white Americans"? Find out how other communities have restricted residence.



In his book on Los Angeles, Harry Carr describes the neighborhoods that were home to the Chinese, Japanese, Jews, African Americans, Filipinos, and Mexican Americans as "foreign colonies." What does the term suggest about the way he divided the city between *us* and *them*? Add to the identity chart for Los Angeles you began in Reading 2. Who was considered one of *us* in Los Angeles in 1850? In the early 1900s?



Write a working definition of the word *segregate*. What does the word mean to you today? How has the idea of segregation shaped the nation's history?

In 1903, 70 local, state, and federal officers raided homes and businesses in Boston's "Chinatown." Chinese who did not have papers showing that they were in the country legally were placed under arrest—224 people in all. Nearly 80 percent were released as soon as friends, neighbors, business associates, or relatives brought their papers to the Federal Building. The rest were deported.

Noting that some of the Chinese were U.S. citizens and that the police did not have search warrants, some Bostonians organized a public protest. Among the speakers was William Lloyd Garrison, whose father was a noted abolitionist. The son denounced the raid as a "menace to constitutional government" and warned that "a few Orientals serve today as a pretext for this encroachment of a power hostile to democratic government. Tomorrow the victims may be Negroes or Jews."⁷

What point was Garrison making about what it means to be a citizen in a democracy? About our "universe of obligation"? How does his message apply to Mexican Americans in Los Angeles in the 1930s? Suppose other people in the city had protested those raids. Would the outcome have been different? Would the victims have felt less isolated and alone?

¹ Quoted in *An Island on the Land* by Carey McWilliams. Meredith Press, 1946, 118-119.

² From *Los Angeles* by Harry Carr. Grosset & Dunlap, 1935, 124-125.

³ Quoted in *Into the West* by Walter Nugent. Vintage, 2001, 222.

⁴ Quoted in *Chicanos in a Changing Society* by Albert Camarillo. Harvard University Press, 1979, 119.

⁵ Quoted in *The Power of Place* by Dolores Hayden. The MIT Press, 1999, 93.

⁶ Quoted in *The Seven States of California* by Philip L. Fradkin. Henry Holt, 1995, 383.

⁷ Quoted in "The Eagle Seeks a Helpless Quarry" by K. Scott Wong in *Asian American Studies* ed. by Jean Wu-wen Shen Wu and Min Song. Rutgers University Press, 2000, 76.

Challenging “Stereotypes, Rumor, and Fear”

In reflecting on the divisions that mark American communities, sociologist David Schoem writes:

“The effort it takes for us to know so little about one another across racial and ethnic groups is truly remarkable.”

The effort it takes for us to know so little about one another across racial and ethnic groups is truly remarkable. That we can live so closely together, that our lives can be so intertwined socially, economically, and politically, and that we can spend so many years of study in grade school and even in higher education and yet still manage to be ignorant of one another is clear testimony to the deep-seated roots of this human and national tragedy. What we do learn along the way is to place heavy reliance on stereotypes, gossip, rumor, and fear to shape our lack of knowledge.¹

In 1941, about 50,000 Japanese Americans made their home in Los Angeles. Most were U.S. citizens. The rest were born in Japan and ineligible for citizenship under what was then American law. Both groups were under increasing attack after Japan bombed the U.S. fleet in Hawaii on December 7, 1941. A Los Angeles newspaper reported that armed Japanese were in Mexico ready to invade California. There were also rumors that Japanese fishermen were planting mines in harbors, blowing up tunnels, and poisoning the water supply. There was no truth to these stories, but each took on a life of its own as it was repeated, exaggerated, and told yet again.

Shaken by the attack, many Americans wondered what went wrong. Some directed their rage at Americans of Japanese descent. They were accused of being an “enemy race” different from and inferior to other Americans. It was not a new charge. For over 100 years, many Americans had seen Asian immigrants as a threat to the “American standard of living” and to “the racial integrity of the nation.” In 1882, the United States banned immigration from China. In 1924, the nation enlarged the ban to all of Asia, including Japan. State and local laws also discriminated against people of Asian descent. California outlawed marriages between Asian and white Americans and did not allow “Asiatic aliens” to buy or inherit property within state borders.

In response to pressure from many individuals and groups, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942. It authorized the army to “designate military areas” from which “any persons may be excluded.” On March 24, General John DeWitt, the head of the Western Defense Command, began forcibly removing every person of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast. In Los Angeles the Japanese were herded into the Santa Anita racetrack before being shipped to Manzanar and other “relocation camps.” Few in the city protested their departure. Instead there was an uneasy silence.

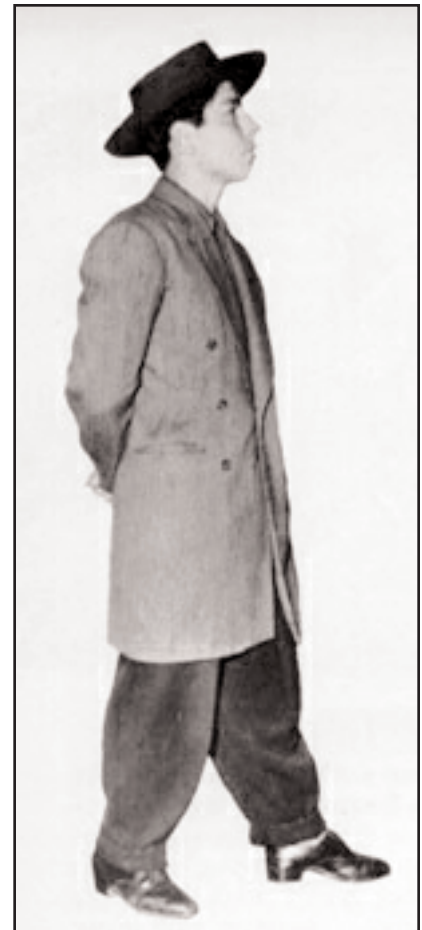
Just days after the Japanese were shipped to internment camps, wrote historian Carey McWilliams, “the Los Angeles newspapers led by the Hearst press began to play up ‘Mexican’ crime and ‘Mexican’ juvenile delinquency.” They targeted teenagers who wore outfits that they called “drapes” and the police referred to as “zoot suits.” A zoot suit had loose-fitting pants with pegged legs and a long jacket with exaggerated shoulders. It was a style popular with not only young Mexican Americans but also African Americans, Filipinos, and some whites. Many saved for months to buy a “zoot suit.” To these teenagers, it was a fashion statement.

Then on August 2, 1942, the body of a young Mexican American, José Díaz, was found at a local swimming hole known as “Sleepy Lagoon.” Although it was not clear that he had been murdered (an autopsy suggested an accident), the police arrested over 300 young Mexican Americans. Later 22 of them were charged with conspiracy to commit murder. At their trial, Los Angeles police captain Edward Duran Ayres told the jury that “while Anglos fought with their fists, Mexicans generally preferred to kill, or at least let blood.” This tendency toward violence, he insisted, could be traced to their “Indian blood” for Indians had “utter disregard for the value of life.” In his instructions to the jury, the judge noted, “In times like these, the behavior of some few members of the fine Mexican-American colony is a disgrace to America, and he who shames America in wartime is a traitor to the democracy that shelters him.”

Three of the 22 defendants were found guilty of first-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison. Nine were convicted of second-degree murder, five of lesser offenses, and five acquitted. The verdict outraged many people in the city. Several hundred of them attended a meeting to organize a defense committee. Among those who supported the committee were Luisa Moreno, a labor organizer originally from Guatemala; Carlotta A. Bass, an African American newspaper editor; movie stars like Henry Fonda and Rita Hayworth; and ordinary citizens like Alice Greenfield McGrath.

McGrath, a young white woman, got involved when the defense attorneys hired her to transcribe the testimony in the trial. She later told a reporter, “As I read, I was horrified by the hatred of these young Mexican Americans that was so evident in the way the judge behaved, in the language prosecutors used. It was racist to the point of being sickening.” When Carey McWilliams, one of the chief organizers, asked her to serve as the executive secretary of the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee, she expressed doubts about her ability to contribute. “I told him I’d never done anything like that before and he said, ‘And now you will.’”

Hundreds of servicemen sent dimes, quarters, and dollar bills to help pay for a new trial. A captain in the Marine Corps sent McWilliams a letter from New



A young Mexican American dressed in a “zoot suit”

Guinea: “This war is being fought for the maintenance and broadening of our democratic beliefs and I am heartily in accord with any effort to apply those principles by assisting in obtaining a review of this case. Please accept my modest contribution.” An African American corporal stationed in Hawaii wrote, “I saw in the *Pittsburgh Courier* that you were leading the fight for victims of aggression. We members of the colored race are sympathetic to your worthwhile and moral fight to free these Mexican boys.”

On October 4, 1944, the District Court of Appeals, in a unanimous decision, reversed the conviction of all of the defendants in the Sleepy Lagoon murder case. They condemned the trial judge for his conduct and had harsh words for the methods used by the prosecution. On October 24, all seventeen prisoners were released from prison. “Hysterical screams and shrieks,” reported the *Los Angeles Times*, “laughter and cries of jubilation welled from the crowd. The atmosphere was electric with excitement as the liberated men were besieged by well-wishers who enthusiastically pumped their hands and slapped their backs. Tears flowed unashamedly.” McWilliams noted, “For the first time in the history of Los Angeles, Mexicans had won an organized victory in the courts.”

Throughout the first trial and the months of appeal, the police continued to harass young Mexican Americans. In May, 1943, Alfred Barela, wrote:

Ever since I can remember I've been pushed around and called names because I'm a Mexican. I was born in this country.... Pretty soon I guess I'll be in the army and I'll be glad to go. But I want to be treated like everybody else. We're tired of being pushed around. We're tired of being told we can't go to this show or that dance hall because we're Mexican or that we better not be seen on the beach front, or that we can't wear draped pants or have our hair cut the way we want to. ... I don't want any more trouble and I don't want anyone saying my people are in disgrace. My people work hard, fight hard in the army and navy of the United States. They're good Americans and should have justice.²

Despite such protests, the newspapers continued to portray Mexican Americans as dangerous and disloyal. After reading these stories day after day, many of the city's residents, including hundreds of young servicemen stationed in L.A., were outraged. In early June, about 200 sailors decided to teach Mexican Americans “a lesson.” They commandeered 20 taxis and cruised the city in search of “zoot-suiters.” They dragged young Filipinos and African Americans as well as Mexicans from theaters, dance halls, and even streetcars and in many cases stripped them of their clothing, while the police watched. After the servicemen moved on, the police arrested the victims.

The same people who organized the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee now demanded justice for the “zoot-suiters.” On June 13, 1943, Lawrence E. Davies of *The New York Times* reported the findings of a special committee the governor had established at their request:

Punishment of the guilty in crimes of violence, “regardless of what clothes they wear, whether they be zoot suiters, police, army or navy uniforms,” was demanded today by a Citizens’ Committee appointed by Governor Earl Warren to investigate the Los Angeles outbreaks of the last ten days involving “zoot-suit” wearers and service men.

Working closely with Robert W. Kenny, State Attorney General, the committee headed by Bishop Joseph T. McGucken of the Catholic diocese here declared that the streets of Los Angeles “must be made safe for service men as well as civilians, regardless of national origins.”

“The community as well as its visitors,” it stated, “must learn that no group has the right to take the law into its own hands.”...

Governor Warren’s committee found it to be “significant” that most of the persons mistreated during the recent incidents in Los Angeles were either persons of Mexican descent or Negroes.

“In undertaking to deal with the cause of these outbreaks,” its report said, “the existence of race prejudice cannot be ignored.”...

“The wearers of zoot suits,” the report went on, “are not necessarily persons of Mexican descent, criminals or juveniles. Many young people today wear zoot suits.

“It is a mistake in fact and an aggravating practice to link the phrase ‘zoot suit’ with the report of a crime. Repeated reports of this character tend to inflame public opinion on false premises and excite further outbreaks.”...

“All juvenile delinquency has increased recently in Los Angeles. This includes crimes committed by youths of Mexican origin. But the fact is that the increase of delinquency in the case of youths of Mexican families has been less than in the case of other national or racial groups and less than the average increase for the community. ...Of the serious crimes committed by persons of Mexican descent, only 25 percent are committed by minors.”

Although we see ourselves as unique individuals, we tend to see others as representatives of groups. It's a natural tendency, psychologists tell us. Although they consider it "natural" to generalize, they view stereotypes as offensive. A *stereotype* is a judgment about an individual based solely on the real or imagined characteristics of a group. People who stereotype are often unwilling to alter their judgments and recognize members of those groups as individuals. How did stereotypes affect the way many white Americans in the 1940s viewed Japanese Americans? The way they viewed Mexican Americans? Young people? How do stereotypes shape perceptions today?



Carey McWilliams described two stereotypes prevalent in Los Angeles in the 1930s and 40s:

One is the working-class kind of stereotype. It's the group that comes in and lacks the skills, the education, the background to get up. So you exclude them. You give them the undesirable jobs, and you sort them out, residentially and otherwise. And of course, you fashion a stereotype to justify what you've done and to perpetuate it. So you say of this

group that they are lazy, shiftless; they have too many children; their sexual morals are terrible, etcetera, etcetera.

And then there is another kind of stereotype. It involves another kind of minority. And you say of this kind of minority, "They're too smart. They're too clever. They're too resourceful. They're too clannish." It's a stereotype, but it's quite a different kind of stereotype because it has to rationalize a different kind of situation. They're both rationalizations, of course.³

To what groups in Los Angeles, do you think McWilliams was referring? What do their experiences suggest about the power of both positive and negative stereotypes? How did some people in Los Angeles attack those stereotypes? How important are such efforts?



Alfred Barela writes, "Ever since I can remember I've been pushed around and called names because I'm a Mexican." Is it true that "sticks and stones can break my bones but names can never hurt me"? How do the names we call each other shape the way we view each other?

How do you explain why young Mexican Americans insisted on wearing their “zoot-suits” even though they knew that they would be harassed? How important are your clothes to the way you see yourself? How do they shape the way adults view adolescents? The way adolescents see themselves? For more information on this period in American history, you may wish to watch the film *Zoot Suit*.



In 1945, the editor of a Spanish-language newspaper argued that “the events of internment and the zoot-suit riots share a common pattern of racism.”⁴ What is that pattern? How did it influence the way individuals and groups saw themselves and others in Los Angeles in the 1940s? How was it intensified by fear? What do the two events suggest about why minorities are particularly vulnerable to discrimination in times of crisis?

Throughout the “zoot-suit riots,” the *Los Angeles Times* printed pictures of the victims’ stripped and beaten bodies on the front page of the paper. Captions identified the victims as members of dangerous gangs who perpetuated the riots. What effect do you think that kind of reporting had on attitudes toward Mexican Americans? What is the role of a newspaper in a community in times of crisis? What role does the media play today in shaping public opinion? How do they define who is “one of us” and who is “one of them”?



One outcome of the “zoot-suit riots” was an alliance among voters from various ethnic groups that resulted in the election of a Mexican American to the city council after the war. In 1963, that same alliance resulted in the election of the first three African Americans to the city council. How important are such alliances to ending discrimination?

¹ From the Introduction to *Inside Separate Worlds* by David Schoem. University of Michigan Press, 1991, 3.

² Quoted in *Double Victory* by Ronald Takaki. Little Brown, 2000, 105-106.

³ Quoted in *The Seven States of California* by Philip L. Fradkin. Henry Holt, 1995, 381.

⁴ Quoted in *Double Victory* by Ronald Takaki. Little Brown, 2000, 179.

“Invisible Communities”

Author Ralph Ellison wrote that as an African American “I am invisible... simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed everything and anything except me.” That “distorting glass” shaped perceptions in Los Angeles in the years after World War II.

In 1956, *U.S. News & World Report* noted with some surprise that even though “Los Angeles still has Negro neighborhoods that are dilapidated and overcrowded,” there are also “middle-class neighborhoods where Negroes occupy neat stucco or frame houses that are graced by lawns and flowering shrubs.” The reporters observed “at aircraft and automobile-assembly plants, as well as other factories, you can now see Negroes working alongside whites at equal rates of pay.” As a result, “city officials claim, and many Negroes concede, that racial friction in Los Angeles is a less explosive problem than in Detroit and other northern cities.” Although the article acknowledged some tension in the city, the reporters were confident that “racial peace and progress” lay ahead.¹

The article, like many of its kind, discounted or ignored serious problems within the African American community. It also failed to mention that the gains the reporters identified did not happen by chance. They were the results of hard-fought campaigns by individuals and groups within the community. Many were mounted by people like Charlotta A. Bass, the owner and editor of the *California Eagle*, the oldest African American newspaper in the United States. *The Eagle* fought and won battles against discriminatory hiring practices at the Southern Telephone Company, Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, Boulder Dam Company, the Los Angeles General Hospital, and the Los Angeles Rapid Transit Company. Bass also co-sponsored with Leon Washington of *The Los Angeles Sentinel* the “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” campaign, which encouraged African Americans to avoid businesses with discriminatory hiring practices.

Not every campaign was a success. Bass and the editors of other black newspapers printed story after story about the way that police officers harassed African Americans and other minorities. Those stories did not bring about changes nor did those that focused on poverty and overcrowding in Watts and other black neighborhoods. At the same time, many of the factories that had provided good jobs for African Americans in Los Angeles were closing or moving elsewhere. There were other problems too. In the 1920s, Los Angeles had one of the nation’s best systems of public transportation. By

the 1950s, it had one of the worst. There was now an assumption that “everyone” in the city owned an automobile. That assumption ignored the city’s poorest residents who were unable to take advantage of the many new jobs that were opening in the suburbs. Not only were many of them unable to live in the suburbs, but without a car, they could not work there either.

For the most part, city leaders ignored these problems. They preferred to believe that African Americans were better off in Los Angeles than they were in most other cities in the nation. Their illusions were shattered on a hot summer night in August of 1965, when young African Americans rocked the city with their rage. The violence began with an arrest at seven P.M. on August 11. Philip Fradkin, then a young reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*, recalls:

A California Highway Patrol officer arrested a twenty-one-year-old black man on suspicion of drunk driving. A crowd gathered. Other officers arrived; someone spit on them. They grabbed a black woman who wore a smock that resembled a maternity dress. Rocks flew. The officers fled.²

Fradkin was hit by one of those rocks. Although he was back on the streets the next day, he writes, “my faith, acquired during the Eisenhower years, in the security that I thought was guaranteed to middle-class, white Americans was irrevocably shaken.” In the days that followed, the violence spread from 103rd and Central in Watts to over 40 square miles of the city. Most of the burned buildings were stores rather than homes or schools. Many were owned by Jews or Italians. When the violence, which Fradkin describes as “an armed conflict between blacks and whites,” finally ended, 34 people were dead and over 1000 wounded. Property damages were estimated at between \$40 million and \$200 million and nearly 4000 persons were under arrest.

The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. visited Los Angeles not long after the violence had ended. A group of young men approached him, claiming victory. King was astonished. “How can you say you won when 34 Negroes are dead, your community is destroyed and whites are using the riot as an excuse for inaction?” he asked. The young men replied, “We won because we made them pay attention to us.”³ To what did *they* pay attention? Fradkin lists the grievances that he and others in the community had ignored.

The large majority of blacks were squeezed into the South Central part of the city, an area that included the former Mexican community of Watts. Among large cities, Los Angeles was the only one whose mayor was hostile to the federal antipoverty program. In 1964, white California voters passed an initiative measure that repealed a fair-housing bill enacted by the state legislature. The extremes in wealth among the races, always quite visible in Los Angeles, had increased. There were constant complaints regarding police brutality about which little was done in the age before camcorders.⁴

**When the violence finally ended,
34 people were dead and over
1000 wounded.**

A governor's commission headed by John A. McCone reached similar conclusions:

While the Negro districts of Los Angeles are not urban gems, neither are they slums. Watts, for example, is a community consisting mostly of one and two-story houses, a third of which are owned by the occupants. In the riot area, most streets are wide and usually quite clean; there are trees, parks, and playgrounds. A Negro in Los Angeles has long been able to sit where he wants in a bus or a movie house, to shop where he wishes, to vote, and to use public facilities without discrimination. The opportunity to succeed is probably unequaled in any other major American city.

Yet the riot did happen here, and there are special circumstances here which explain in part why it did. Perhaps the people of Los Angeles should have seen trouble gathering under the surface calm. In the last quarter century, the Negro population here has exploded. While the County's population has trebled, the Negro population has increased almost tenfold from 75,000 in 1940 to 650,000 in 1965. Much of the increase came through migration from Southern states and many arrived with the anticipation that this dynamic city would somehow spell the end of life's endless problems. To those who have come with high hopes and great expectations and see the success of others so close at hand, failure brings a special measure of frustration and disillusionment. Moreover, the fundamental problems, which are the same here as in the cities which were racked by the 1964 riots, are intensified by what may well be the least adequate network of public transportation in any major city in America.

The commissioners went on to say that their recommendations "apply with equal force to the Mexican Americans, a community which is almost equal in size to the Negro community and whose circumstances are similarly disadvantageous and demand equally urgent treatment." In the years that followed, life in Watts and other minority neighborhoods did not improve. If anything, life became more difficult.

What did it mean to be “invisible” in the 1960s? Who is “invisible” today? What was the danger to the community as a whole of seeing “everything and anything except me”? Philip Fradkin writes that as a result of the violence in Watts, “my faith, acquired during the Eisenhower years, in the security that I thought was guaranteed to middle-class, white Americans was irrevocably shaken.” Where did that faith come from? How is it linked to the invisibility Ellison describes?



In 1968, a commission headed by Governor Otto Kerner of Illinois investigated riots that took place in a number of American cities in 1967. The commission warned: “Our Nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal.” To what extent was the report true of Los Angeles? To what extent does the McCone report suggest that life in Los Angeles was more complicated than a division between “two societies—one black, one white”?

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Reverend James Lawson, and other leaders in the Civil Rights Movement believed that violence is not the way to attack discrimination and segregation. How else might young African Americans have advocated for change? Expressed their outrage?



White Americans often refer to disturbances like the one that erupted in Watts in 1965 as “riots.” African Americans often describe them as “rebellions” or “revolutions.” James Lawson who taught non-violence to the students whose peaceful “sit-ins” launched the Civil Rights Movement, calls them “urban explosions.” How would you describe them? How was the violence in Watts in 1965 similar to the “zoot-suit riots”? The “Chinese massacre” of 1871? What differences seem most striking? How important are the names we give an event? For example, what is the difference between a rebellion and a riot? To what extent do the names we give an event shape the way we view that event?

To what extent do the names we give an event shape the way we view that event?

¹ “West Coast Too Has Its Race Problems,” *U.S. News & World Report*, (June 29, 1956), 36-43.

² Quoted in *The Seven States of California* by Philip L. Fradkin. Henry Holt, 1995, 393.

³ Quoted in “King Case Aftermath: A City in Crisis” by Amy Wallace and Nora Zamichow. *Los Angeles Times*, May 2, 1992.

⁴ Quoted in *The Seven States of California* by Philip L. Fradkin. Henry Holt, 1995, 392.

“Squeezed Between Black and White”

In the late 1960s, a new wave of immigrants changed the face of the city of Los Angeles and the nation. Until 1965, the nation’s immigration laws favored immigrants from Western Europe over those from other parts of the world. It literally cut off all immigration from Asia and Africa. In 1965, a new law ended that discrimination by establishing a new system that gave preferences to refugees from all parts of the world, people with relatives in the United States, and workers with needed skills.

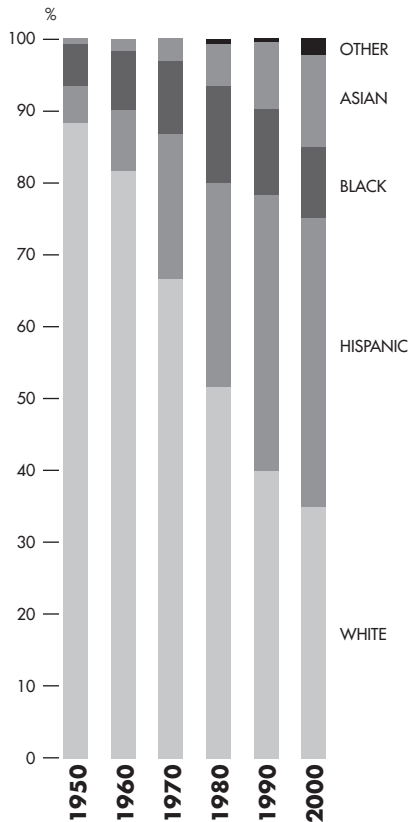
As a result of the new law, immigration increased dramatically. Among the newcomers were thousands of Koreans and other Asians. Sociologists Nancy Abelmann and John Lie write:

It is difficult to generalize about a large group of people. There were, for example, over 700,000 Korean Americans in the United States in 1990 and over 7.2 million people of Asian descent. ... Some are fourth- or even fifth-generation immigrants, others have immigrated recently or are war refugees; some are Buddhist, others are Christian; some speak only English, others speak any number of literally hundreds of languages. Take educational achievement in 1980, 51.9 percent of Asian Indians held college degrees, while the comparable figure was 2.9 percent for the Hmong from Southeast Asia. At the same time that the poverty rate among Laotians was 67.2 percent, it was only 4.2 percent for Japanese Americans. Although Korean Americans’ median family income was slightly above the U.S. average, so was their proportion of persons below the poverty level. Inequality and poverty remain serious problems for Asian Americans. ...

More mundanely, little unity exists among Asian Americans. Conflict and even animosity plague different groups—old-timers and new immigrants, Japanese Americans and Korean Americans, rich Korean Americans and poor Korean Americans and so on.¹

Asian Americans, like other immigrant groups, are often so focused on their own goals that they may pay very little attention to the way their pursuit of a better life affects others in the city. For example, many Korean Americans were astonished to find their businesses under attack during the violence that shook Los Angeles in 1992. Sociologist Eui-Young Yu, a Korean American, writes:

Whenever I see the videotape of the Rodney King beating, I feel strongly that a great injustice was done. I fully understood the anger coming from the black community. After many years of legal and social segregation and oppression, they experienced only small gains after the civil rights movement of the 1960s. At the same time, I was afraid for the Korean



The graph shows the proportion of Los Angeles County residents by race and ethnicity. The new immigration law took effect in 1968. How did it alter Los Angeles?

merchants in South Central because of the mutual ignorance and lack of understanding between African Americans and Koreans. The first steps toward building a bridge are open expression and communication.²

The consequences of that “mutual ignorance and lack of understanding” were evident in the trial of a Korean storekeeper accused of shooting a young African American girl. After an argument over a bottle of orange juice, Soon Ja Du shot Latasha Harlins in the back. Although Du was found guilty of second-degree murder in November of 1991, the judge sentenced her to five years probation, 400 hours of community service, and a \$500 fine. Many African Americans, including Harlins’ family, were deeply offended by the decision, while many Korean Americans believed that Soon Ja Du was acting in self-defense. Nancy Abelmann and John Lie interviewed a number of Korean Americans for their book *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots*. They write:

Older Korean Americans who “knew war [in Korea or in Vietnam],” a Korean shorthand for drawing generational lines, said that [the L.A. riots were] like “war.” In the days before the retrial of the police officers in 1993, the liquor store owner Jay Shin “monitored his store from the mall’s parking lot, surrounded by men who were armed,” and told *Boston Globe* reporters: “I’ve been in Vietnam, the Korean War, and I’ve owned a liquor store in South Central L.A....So I guess I’ve been in danger all my life.” ...

For some, the riots conjured up historical memory beyond division or war, touching on colonial memory. One man said that the more he thought about the riots the more he was reminded of the great Japanese Kantō earthquake in 1923, when Korean immigrants [colonial servants] were scapegoated and thousands were killed after the quake. “We [Koreans] were caught between the Japanese people and the government then, just like we are today between black and whites.”³

Elaine H. Kim, a professor of Asian American literature and a Korean American, believes that being caught in the middle affects the way other people view Korean Americans:

Korean Americans are squeezed between black and white and also between U.S. and South Korean political agendas. Opportunistic American and South Korean presidential candidates toured the burnt ruins, posing for the television cameras but delivering nothing of substance to the victims. Like their U.S. counterparts, South Korean news media seized upon *sai-i-ku* [April 29th, the day the L.A. riots began] featuring sensational stories that depicted the problem as that of savage African Americans attacking innocent Koreans for no reason. To give the appearance of authenticity, Seoul newspapers even published articles using the names of Korean Americans who did not in fact write them.

Those of us who chafe at being asked whether we are Chinese or Japanese as if there were no other possibilities or who were angered when the news media sought Chinese and Japanese as if there were no other possibilities or who were angered when the news media sought Chinese and Japanese but not Korean American views during *sa-i-ku* are sensitive to an invisibility that seems particular to us. To many Americans, Korea is but the gateway to or the bridge between China and Japan, or a crossroads of major Asian conflicts.

Although little known or cared about in the Western world, Korea has been a perennial battleground. Besides the Mongols and the Manchus, there were the *Y<o>jin* (Jurchen), the *Koran* (Khitans), and the *Waegu* (Wakō) invaders. In relatively recent years, there was the war between China and Japan that ended in 1895 and the war between Japan and Russia in 1905, both of which were fought on Korean soil and resulted in extreme suffering for the Korean people. Japan's thirty-six years of brutal colonial rule ended with the United States and what was then the Soviet Union dividing the country in half at the 38th parallel. Thus, Korea was turned into a cold war territory that ultimately became a battleground for world superpowers during the conflict of 1950-53.

... One of the consequences of war, colonization, national division and superpower economic and cultural domination has been the migration of Koreans to places like Los Angeles, where they believed their human rights would be protected by law. After all, they had received U.S.-influenced political educations. They started learning English in the seventh grade. They all knew the story of the poor boy from Illinois who became president. They all learned that the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights protected the common people from violence and injustice. But they who grew up in Korea watching "Gunsmoke," "Night Rider," and "MacGyver" dubbed in Korean were not prepared for the black, brown, red, and yellow America they encountered when they disembarked at the Los Angeles International Airport. They hadn't heard that there is no equal justice in the United States. They had to learn about American racial hierarchies. They did not realize that, as immigrants of color, they would never attain political voice or visibility but would instead be used to uphold the inequality and the racial hierarchy they had no part in creating.

Most of the newcomers had underestimated the communication barriers they would face. ... Working fourteen hours a day, six or seven days a week, they rarely came into sustained contact with English-speaking Americans and almost never had time to study English. Not feeling at ease with English, they did not engage in informal conversations easily with non-Koreans and were hated for being curt and rude. They did not attend churches or do business in banks or other enterprises where English was

required. Typically, the immigrant, small-business owners utilized unpaid family labor instead of hiring people from local communities. Thanks to Eurocentric American cultural practices, they knew little or nothing good about African Americans or Latinos, who in turn and for similar reasons knew little or nothing good about them. At the same time, Korean shop-owners in South Central and Koreatown were affluent compared with the impoverished residents, whom they often exploited as laborers or looked down upon as fools with an aversion to hard work. Most Korean immigrants did not even know that they were among the many direct beneficiaries of the African American-led civil rights movement, which helped pave the way for the 1965 reforms that made their immigration possible.⁴

Each of us is shaped by not only a history but also a culture.

Each of us is shaped by not only a history but also a culture. “Yang” is a wholesaler who joined an armed patrol during the riots and once owned a shop in a Latino neighborhood. Abelmann and Lie write:

At his sandwich shop he tried to teach Latino customers about Korean history and stressed the importance of “sharing histories.” Yang explained that Koreans “have a remarkable ability to persevere under difficult circumstances.” Asking, “Do you know why Koreans eat so quickly?” he explained that this Korean trait is a wartime vestige. Similarly, a Korean American owner of a dry cleaner, “the ‘highest’ of businesses with *very* ‘high’ [class] people,” claimed: “We are a nation that has lived through many hungry periods. So we have learned to work hard. We like to do everything quickly—quick, quick, quick,—eat quickly, succeed quickly, get rich quickly.” Yang suggested that the even greater war experience of the Vietnamese has made them even less patient. Predicting that Vietnamese Americans will succeed Korean Americans in South Central Los Angeles, just as Korean Americans succeeded Jews, he warned: “When the Vietnamese go into South Central, it will be an entirely different matter: they will not put up with things the way we Koreans have—their country has been at war for thirty years.” ...

For Yang, racial tension in Los Angeles is the story of people who cannot talk to each other. Dramatizing his point by shifting his body back and darting a suspicious look in our direction, he explained: “When all people can do is look askance at each other and wonder what the other is thinking about them, their imaginations start to run wild—it takes on a life of its own having *nothing* to do with reality.”⁵

Write a working definition of the word *immigration*. How is *immigration* different from a *migration* like the one described in Reading 3? What does it mean to be “caught in the middle”? What does it mean to be “squeezed” between two groups?



In the 1880s, a Los Angeles resident noted, “Here were 40,000 or 50,000 people suddenly gathered together from all parts of the Union, in utter ignorance of one another’s previous history.” How did not knowing one another’s history affect the city in late 1800s and early 1900s? What does this reading suggest about the way it is shaping life in the city today?



What role can education play in breaking down the stereotypes? In building bridges? How important is it that we know one another’s histories? Understand one another’s culture, or way of life?



As a Korean American, Elaine Kim describes the disparities between the “American dream” and the realities of life for many Korean Americans. She refers to “American racial hierarchies”

which have been hard to break. What kind of education would challenge “hierarchies” and close the gap between the ideal and the reality for the next group of immigrants?



In reflecting on issues of race and class in Los Angeles, Bong Hwan Kim, the director of the Korean Youth and Community Center, told an interviewer:

It’s crucial for Korean Americans to participate in the decisions that affect their lives. That’s why we have programs to help Korean immigrants become U.S. citizens and campaigns to get people registered to vote. We also have leadership development internship programs for Korean American youth, because they can serve as bridges between the immigrant families and the society at large, and because they could become agents of change in our community in the future.⁶

Write a working definition of the word *immigrant*. What are the challenges that every immigrant faces? How do those challenges affect an immigrant’s ability to realize his or her dreams? What happens when dreams collide?

¹ Reprinted by permission of the publishers from *Blue Dreams* by Nancy Abelman and John Lie, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Copyright © 1995 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

² From *East to America* by Elaine H. Kim and Eui-Young Yu. New Press, 1996, 362.

³ *Blue Dreams* by Nancy Abelman and John Lie. 19-20.

⁴ © Elaine Kim

⁵ *Blue Dreams* by Nancy Abelman and John Lie. 21-22.

⁶ Interview in *East to America* by Elaine H. Kim and Eui-Young Yu. New Press, 1996, 351.

Conflict in the Promised Land

By the year 2000 Los Angeles was the most ethnically diverse city in the world. Latinos accounted for 45 percent of the city's population. Asians made up 12 percent; and African Americans 9 percent. The remaining 32 percent were white. Those numbers tell just a part of the story. Los Angeles is also the second-largest Armenian, Korean, Filipino, Salvadoran, and Guatemalan city in the world. Only Mexico City and Guadalajara are home to more Mexicans. It is the also third largest Canadian city and home to the largest Japanese, Iranian, Cambodian, and "Gypsy" communities in the United States. There are more Samoans in Los Angeles than in American Samoa. Over 96 languages are spoken in the city's schools. In reflecting on that diversity, the editor of *LA Weekly* said:

The many ethnic communities are mostly phantom communities—they're invisible to most of us. Their cultural aspirations don't intrude on ours. They don't annex any of our cultures. I live close to a number of ethnic groups, and I have no idea what they do to have a good time. In part that's because I can't read their newspapers and posters. So we have a society that's genuinely multi-ethnic but also impenetrable.¹

Another resident, the curator of a museum, had a similar view. "The various ethnic communities don't knit together. They seem to be leaderless—at least I have no sense of who their leading figures are. Los Angeles is not a melting pot. Instead it's fractured, with a frail superstructure. There is no sense of connection between the different parts of the megalopolis, whereas in New York there is no space within the city to avoid that connection. In Los Angeles the problem is partly geographical, because the city is so dispersed."²

The problem is also partly cultural as reporter John Yemma discovered in 1997. He writes:

As a young man in 1962, Leroy Shepard was part of a massive wave of black migration from the Deep South to California.

The Golden State was the Promised Land, a place with jobs and opportunity for all—unlike Shepard's native South Carolina, where Jim Crow laws were deeply entrenched.

Nobel laureate Ralph Bunche and baseball great Jackie Robinson went to UCLA. California had enacted a sweeping civil rights law in 1959, five years before the federal government did. By the time Shepard arrived in Los Angeles, the black population was exploding.

By the year 2000 Los Angeles was the most ethnically diverse city in the world.

This might have integrated the city, blacks moving into a largely white and Latino center. Instead, in a pattern repeated again and again in urban America, whites fled to the suburbs. South Central LA, where Shepard settled, became predominantly black.

“Oh, we didn’t mind that white folks left,” Shepard, 62, recalled recently. “It just gave us more houses.”

But nothing stays the same for long in an urban magnet like LA. For the past decade, a new wave of people has been pouring into Shepard’s neighborhood. ...

At first, the Latino influx re-integrated Shepard’s neighborhood—black and Latino this time. But that was short-lived. “A lot of black people are leaving. It won’t be too long before the place is all Mexican,” said Shepard, surveying a quiet street where older homeowners tend to be black and younger ones Latino. “Black people are saying the same thing about Mexicans that the whites said about us. Sometimes we get mad at those doggone Mexicans.”

Throughout the nation, the changing complexion of the population—in particular, the rapidly increasing Latino and Asian communities—is complicating the long, tortured debate about race in America, creating new tensions among minority groups and making it virtually impossible to look at racial politics in strictly black and white terms.

If integration is being profoundly reexamined today, a big reason is that the nation has become so much more ethnically and racially diverse than it was during the heyday of the civil rights movement in the 1960s—a time when the United States was almost literally a white/black society.

Census data back then put blacks at about 10 percent of the population; whites were 89 percent, with Asians, Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and Eskimos together making up less than 1 percent. Latinos were lumped in with whites, and even in unofficial estimates they were no more than 4 percent of the total.

As late as 1968, President Johnson’s Kerner Commission, which investigated the causes of the race riots that tore through American cities in the summer of 1967, could make the unqualified statement that “our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal.”

Though many scholars contend that inequality and social fracturing are as bad as ever, no one argues that America is divided only into black and white. ...

At least one-quarter of the population today is non-white. By 2050, according to Census Bureau projections, America will be 53 percent white, 25 percent Latino, 13.6 percent black, and 8 percent Asian. Rapidly increasing rates of intermarriage will further change the picture, blurring racial and ethnic lines and creating a growing population of multiracial people who do not fit neatly into the old categories. ...

As in South Central L.A., urban neighborhoods everywhere are becoming browner. Middle-class blacks, meanwhile, are moving to the suburbs, helping to integrate those once all-white enclaves but also leaving neighborhoods like South Central LA increasingly to poor and old blacks, and young Latino immigrants.

At South Park Elementary School, where 71 percent of the children are Latino and 28 percent black, principal Karen Rose describes a “struggle in the neighborhood” as the population has swung dramatically from black to Latino in the past 10 years.

“African Americans are feeling like they are getting pushed out,” says Rose, who is white.

She and her multiracial crew of teachers work closely with the children to dampen racial animosity that, she says, inevitably percolates down from parents.

In the senior center where Shepard works, meanwhile, older black men and women struggle through twice-weekly Spanish lessons, hoping to learn enough vocabulary to communicate with their new neighbors, many of whom are such recent arrivals that they have not mastered English.

“You’ve got to be able to tell them if their chickens are bothering you or if they have too many families living under one roof,” says Shepard.

Gaps in language and lifestyle mask even deeper gaps in point of view. ...

“Many African Americans see Latinos as competitors for jobs and housing and feel that education is turning too much into bilingual education,” says Earl Ofari Hutchinson, author of *Beyond O.J.: Race, Sex and Class Lessons for America*. “It is difficult to build coalitions when you have different groups with different agendas. But it is also an old story to pit one group against another.” ...

“You sense a certain competition for jobs and political and economic prominence by Latinos and blacks, a fighting for limited resources,” said Danny Villanueva, a Mexican-American venture capitalist active in Los Angeles politics. “You also sense that there’s a passing of the baton here, a transition.” ...

Overall, Asians and Latinos are rapidly moving into middle- and upper-middle class ranks, a recent report by [Gregory] Rodriguez [of California's Pepperdine University] shows. Blacks are doing so more slowly. ...

Inner-city black poverty and unemployment, meanwhile, remain stubbornly high—near 50 percent joblessness for young black men in some cities. The result: growing friction between minorities. ...

Here's how complex the new paradigm has become: The 1992 LA riots were directed as much against Latino and Korean businesses as against white ones. What happened on the streets of South Central will not soon be forgotten, says Bong Hwan Kim, who runs a Korean-American community center. ...

Most observers caution, however, that it would be unfair to portray black-Latino and black-Asian relations as mainly competitive and antagonistic. The emergence of other minorities could help society overall, says Gerald Horne, a black studies scholar at the University of North Carolina. ...

Back on the street in LA, Leroy Shepard, who has witnessed so much change in his neighborhood in the 35 years he has lived there, likes the idea of a ... dialogue on race issues. Instead of continuing to follow the old pattern of one immigrant group fleeing from the next, he says, it would be better to get a grip on race relations once and for all.

Shepard spoke on a street corner outside the senior center where he works. To his right was a block of brightly painted stucco houses battened down with burglar bars. It is a neighborhood where deep-seated problems like crime and poverty are blind to race and ethnicity.

"We have to stop and take a look at ourselves and our communities," Shepard said. "We can't run from our problems. America is changing, but we have to make it work here."

He emphasized the word "here."³

In 1968, the Kerner Commission stated in its report on the riots that ripped through Los Angeles and other American cities, “This deepening racial division is not inevitable. The movement apart can be reversed. Choice is still possible.” How are those remarks similar to Shepard’s statement that “we can’t run from our problems. America is changing, but we have to make it work here.” How do you account for differences?



Add to the identity chart for Los Angeles that you began in Reading 2. What new events have complicated the way residents view their city’s identity? What does the 2000 Census reveal about the way your community has changed over the last ten years? What similarities do you see between Los Angeles and your own community? What differences seem most striking?



Write a working definition of the word *integration*. How does your knowledge of segregation deepen your understanding of integration?

How do you build a community or a nation that takes into account many different points of view?



Leroy Shepard told the reporter, “Black people are saying the same things about Mexicans that whites said about us.” How do you account for such patterns? What part does fear play? Ignorance of one another’s history and culture? What is the role of competition? How can such patterns be broken?



How do we “get a grip on race relations once and for all”? What part does education play? History? Culture? Politics?

¹ Quoted in *L.A. Days, L.A. Nights* by Stephen Brook. St. Martin’s Press, 1992, 150-151.

² *Ibid.*, 151.

³ “America’s changing face: South Central Los Angeles exemplifies the melting pot of the 1990’s” by John Yemma. *Boston Globe*, September 17, 1997.

Riots, Then and Now

The “Los Angeles riots” of 1965 and 1992 began with the arrest of an African American. Distrust between the police and blacks has been a part of life in Los Angeles—and the nation—for generations. In a 1992 interview with Anna Deavere Smith, Stanley K. Sheinbaum, the former president of the Los Angeles Police Commission, recalled meeting with young gang members just a week or two before the violence in Los Angeles erupted. The group was trying to work out a gang truce, when Sheinbaum arrived with Congresswoman Maxine Waters. Two days later, he received a letter from an officer saying “You went in and talked to our enemy.” He responded by explaining that this was an opportunity to speak with and learn about “these curious people about whom I knew nothing.” At the end of his speech, the officers asked, “So which side are you on?” He responded with his own question: “Why do I have to be on a side? There’s a problem here.”

In 1992, the *Oregonian* reported that “complaints of police brutality and racism” and “verdicts and settlements against the [Los Angeles Police] have risen over the decades, from \$553,000 in 1972 to \$6.4 million in 1989 to \$8 million in 1990.” The article went on to note that “in the first two months of this year there was a sharp rise in complaints filed against the police—127 for two months, against a yearly average over the last five years of about 600. About 25 percent of the complaints involve allegations of assaults by the police. On average, only two of the 600 complaints a year result in felony charges.”

Nearly ten years later, Bob Herbert, a columnist for *The New York Times*, wrote:

I can still remember leafing through *Life* magazine in July 1967. I was just back from overseas, a 22-year-old sergeant stationed at Fort Belvoir, VA, where I would serve out my last few months in the Army.

On the cover of the magazine was a photograph of a 12-year-old boy lying unconscious on the filthy pavement of a street in Newark, NJ. He was bleeding from gunshot wounds.

The story was about the riots that in a few days had all but ruined Newark. I froze when I got to page 16. There was a photo of a guy I knew from Montclair, Billy Furr, caught in the act of looting beer from a liquor store. The photo was the first in a frightening series that showed cops suddenly appearing at the scene, Billy Furr running, a cop in a helmet aiming a shotgun at Billy’s back, and Billy continuing to run.

The cop shot and killed him. On page 22 was a picture of Billy lying on the sidewalk, dead at 24. The cop with the shotgun stood over the body. He didn't look particularly concerned. Pellets from the shotgun blast also struck the 12-year-old boy whose photo was on the magazine's cover. Though seriously wounded, he would survive. The cop didn't seem too concerned about him either.

I remember sitting in the barracks at Fort Belvoir, stunned. And I still feel strange whenever I see those pictures.

Last week there were riots in Cincinnati, sparked by the fatal shooting of 19-year-old Timothy Thomas, a black kid who was said to have run from a cop. Mr. Thomas was wanted for failing to respond to several misdemeanor traffic charges. Five of the charges were for not wearing a seat belt while driving.

As in Newark, the rioting in Cincinnati was an explosive expression of the rage among blacks that had built up at the hands of the police, public officials and other influential figures throughout society, most of them white. You'll find that kind of maddening, simmering rage everywhere you find black people in the United States. It is the rage that comes from living in a society where every day there are humiliating reminders of one's debased status.

But race issues are complex and sometimes paradoxical. It is possible to look back over the past half-century and conclude that we have come a long way and made surprisingly little progress, all at the same time.

Police brutality, a criminal justice system that works one way for whites and another for blacks, employment discrimination, housing discrimination, the continuing fanatical resistance to real integration, social ostracism—these are not remnants from some distant past, but rather the everyday reality of life for blacks in America in 2001.

Black people are angry because there is more than ample reason to be angry.

That said, there is something both weird and very wrong about continuing to respond to the outrages of racism and police brutality by throwing bottles, smashing windows, overturning cars, looting stores, burning down buildings, shooting at police officers and dragging innocent white motorists from their vehicles and attempting to beat and stomp them to death.

I felt as sick watching the video of Reginald Denny being hauled from his truck and savagely beaten during the Los Angeles riots in 1992 as I did looking at the sequence of photos of Billy Furr being killed in 1967.

Few blacks ever riot. And some of the worst rioting over the past four decades has had surprisingly interracial components. There was widespread looting by whites as well as blacks in the horrible rioting that brought Detroit to its knees less than two weeks after the outburst in Newark. And more than half of the people arrested during the 1992 rioting in Los Angeles were Hispanic.

But after the riots, when the smoke from the arson fires has lifted and the spasms of violence have passed, it is the black residents who, inevitably, have endured the worst of the suffering—lives lost, neighborhoods destroyed, hopes for the future derailed.

That is a peculiar way of addressing one’s grievances.

Racism and police brutality should never be tolerated. But after so many tragic eruptions over so many decades, it’s time for everyone to recognize the need for a smarter, more effective response to these evils than a riot.¹

CONNECTIONS

READING 8

What does Sheinbaum’s experience suggest about the divisions between the police and African Americans in the city? How might they contribute to myths, misunderstandings, and misinformation? How might they fuel violence?



What are the alternatives to riots? What part can education play? The media? What can individuals do to make a difference? What is the role of law? How do laws get changed? What would a “smarter, more effective response” to racism and police brutality be?

Read the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. It guarantees the right of individuals to associate, advocate, and even express outrage. How have individuals and groups in Los Angeles and other cities used these protections to bring about change, including changes in laws?



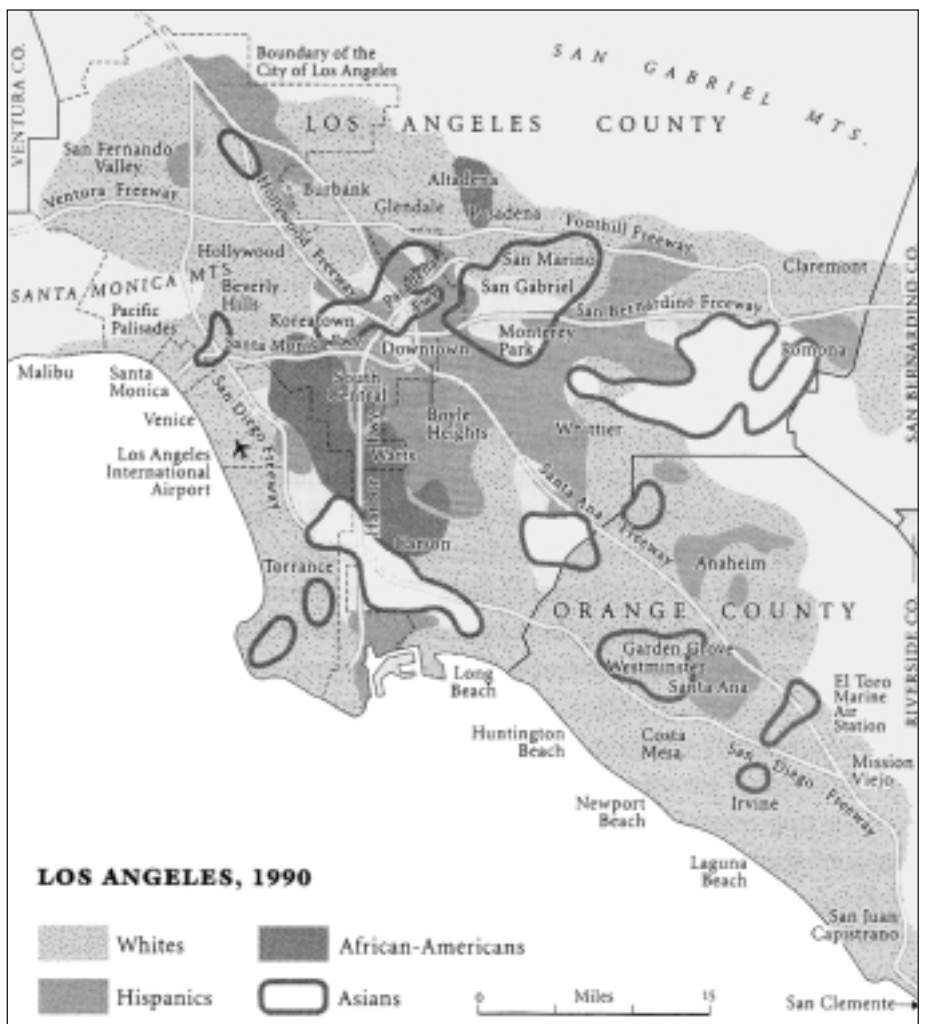
In a 1992 interview with Anna Deavere Smith, artist Rudy Salas recalled being harassed by the police in the 1940s because he was a “zoot-suiter.” “How do you think a father feels,” he asks, “stuff that happened to me fifty years ago happened to my son?” Why does history repeat itself? What can be done to break the cycle?

¹ “Riots, Then and Now” by Bob Herbert. *The New York Times*, April 19, 2001.

Viewing *Twilight: Los Angeles*

This part of the guide focuses on *Twilight: Los Angeles*. It includes a reading, a map, a timeline of the events featured in the film, and a brief guide to the performance. The questions and activities that follow ask you to think about *Twilight: Los Angeles* and the story it tells.

Los Angeles covers more land than any city in the United States. In 1992, Greater Los Angeles, with an area of 34,000 square miles, stretched across five counties. The map below shows the city in 1990 and highlights some of the places referred to in the film.



Remembering the “Los Angeles Riots”

In 1997, journalist Richard Rodriguez imagined Los Angeles in 2042, 50 years after the “Los Angeles riots” of 1992.

“Sometimes I think that L.A. saw its future for the very first time during those terrible days of late April and early May.”

What do I remember of those days in 1992? I remember standing on a rooftop along Sunset Boulevard and seeing the southern horizon filled with smoke. Some terrible excitement, some evil thrill, made me shiver at the destruction.

Here I sit, a dry old man. Fifty years have passed. So much has changed in Los Angeles. The city seems younger to me, now that my eyes are bad and my hands shake. I remember how the newspapers and the voices on television talked about the “black riot.” But I saw hundreds of Latinos rushing out of stores that had been busted open, rushing out with their arms full of appliances and tall boxes of Pampers. It was as though the Latinos had stolen the black riot and made it their own.

I stood watching, almost ready to steal something myself. I remember the cops coming and, when they made a half-hearted show of force, I found myself running with the mob and I heard myself laughing—it felt like my mouth was unconnected to the rest of my body—as I ran with the panting crowd.

Many people said after those violent days that L.A. had killed itself, slammed open its soul on the street, and left it to bleed on the pavement with all the broken glass. I knew people who left town, left L.A. for any place else. I knew people who would never again go downtown without feeling afraid of the stranger.

But L.A. did not die. L.A. is too resilient. L.A. is filled with too many babies and teenage fathers and too many grandmothers who hope for the future. Sometimes I think that L.A. saw its future for the very first time during those terrible days of late April and early May.

Karl Marx wrote that the discovery of gold in California would prove to be a more important event in the history of the world than the discovery of the Americas by Columbus. When the European met the Indian in 1492, two continents met. But after gold was discovered in California in 1848, the entire world converged. For the first time in human history, the African met the Filipino met the Peruvian met the Mexican met the Australian met the Chinese met the Russian. Men fought over gold in the muddy fields. Men died. But the world had met.

I think about Karl Marx’s prediction whenever I look at Los Angeles, this city so full of life, so full of babies who look like none of their

grandparents exactly. I know children who are Jewish Filipinos with Iranian cousins who are married to Guatemalans. No wonder L.A. has become the true capital of America.

Already in the 1990s it was predicted that L.A. was becoming an Hispanic city, and California was becoming Hispanic. But nobody really knew what any of it meant. Many people thought that Hispanics were a racial group and that Hispanics were comparable to “blacks” or “whites.” They thought that L.A. was literally becoming a brown city. They did not understand *brown* as a figure of speech.

L.A. a Mexican city. Did you know that by the 18th century, the majority population in Mexico was “mixed”—neither pure European nor pure Indian? Did you know that the highest rate of intermarriage between the Indian and the African in the Americas took place in Mexico?

You read in your school book about Rodney King. I do not remember what finally happened to him. The history of the United States is filled with many such men as Rodney King.

By 1992, once again, a black man had been brutally beaten by the police. But the incident was caught on videotape. The white cops went on trial; the cops were judged innocent. Which sent young blacks into a rage over in South-Central when that was still mainly a black neighborhood.

Strangers pulled strangers from their cars. Blacks attacked whites. In those first hours, before darkness fell, it seemed like a simple story, a story we had known before—another Detroit, another Harlem, another Watts—a story with a narrative line we knew from memory. What nobody quite understood in those first hours was the problem of having a black riot in a brown city.

The city slept restlessly. The next day there were black mobs attacking Korean stores. And Koreans stood on rooftops with guns in their hands. And Vietnamese were mistaken for Koreans by the black mob. And Salvadoran kids went downtown shouting revolutionary slogans in Spanish.

California is not an innocent place. Think of the terrible cruelties against the Chinese. Remember San Francisco. Early in the century, striking workers were shot by the police and they died on Market Street in neat pools of blood. And don't forget that L.A. had seen murder in the 1940s, when Mexicans fought the police.

There are many grievances in a place as big as this place, and sometimes those grievances are not contained. People go crazy. A rock is flung through a window, the mob senses its power when the initial offense goes unchallenged. The mob feels its muscle swell. The police are surprised at first, and then in awe of the swelling. And then the police turn angry.

“There are many grievances in a place as big as this place, and sometimes those grievances are not contained.”

“Sometimes the truest ideas, the most durable insights, come when the heart is racing and the air is full of smoke.”

These are not matters for an old man to remember. It tires me to recall the waste, the destruction, the death of the young—why is it always the young who riot?

The thing that was different about 1992 was the size and scope. The entire city felt implicated and afraid. Los Angeles—an entire metropolis—felt threatened as block after block fell and the fire spread. Soon the freeways filled as people tried to leave town, seeking safety from the mob and the fires. Fear slowed the San Diego freeway and gridlock turned into panic.

It was the worst moment for Los Angeles. It was also the first moment, I think, when most people in L.A. realized they were part of the whole. The city that the world mocked for not being a city, for lacking a center, having only separate suburbs, separate freeway exits—L.A. realized that it was interconnected. In fear, people realized that what was happening on the other side of town implicated them.

Isn't that odd? You'd think, perhaps, that the idea of our human interconnectedness would be a pleasing one. But no, it's a hard idea. Sometimes the truest ideas, the most durable insights, come when the heart is racing and the air is full of smoke.

I do not know how to say this even now, so many years later. But I think L.A.—the idea of the city entire—was born during those dark nights, while the sirens wailed and old women in Santa Monica realized that they shared the same city as teenagers in Compton.

It is an odd inheritance that my generation has passed to yours. We have given you the idea of a city. And, of course, because you are young and innocent of the cruelties of history, you do not understand that yours is a hard-won inheritance. Perhaps you assume it.

It is 2042 and you know things that we did not know fifty years ago. You realize better than we did that Asia is close. You realize that Seoul [the capital of South Korea] is closer, more important to your daily life, than Brussels [the capital of Belgium]. These are new ideas in America. Treasure them.

It is your generation's luxury to realize that L.A., even California, is part of Latin America. You expand our sense of the city in directions far beyond the city limits. You understand, in ways my generation did not, that Tijuana is part of southern California. We had no idea.

We lived, for the most part, in separate suburbs until 1992. We thought of ourselves in discreet little categories. We thought ourselves white or black or Asian or Hispanic. These were categories given to us by government bureaucrats, and for a while they made sense to us.

I remember an actor named Keanu Reeves—his mother was Anglo Saxon, his father was Hawaiian-Chinese. And from those days I remember a golfer—an elegant young athlete named Tiger Woods. His mother was Thai, his father was black and Caucasian and American Indian. When such people came into prominence, their complexity astonished America. We were just then beginning to exhaust the old ways of talking about ourselves.

I sit in late afternoon and hear the unruly, the rude, the laughing young people coming home from school. There are times when their voices wake me from my nap. Sometimes I lie in bed and time seems the mystery of life. I feel myself a boy, imagine my mother downstairs and my sister coming home from school. ...

I am an old man. I sit here remembering a riot that took place in your city fifty years ago. 1992.¹

CONNECTIONS

REMEMBERING

What does Richard Rodriguez mean when he writes, “It was as though the Latinos had stolen the black riot and made it their own”?



What happens when you come to see others as “strangers”? When you view them with fear?



Rodriguez says that “L.A. has become the true capital of America.” Do you agree? Is it true that what happens in Los Angeles today will happen elsewhere in the near future?

Why does Rodriguez call the word *brown* a figure of speech? What does the word mean in this context? To whom does it refer? Does his description of a “black riot in a brown city” include the role Korean Americans and white Americans played in the violence? What might be a better description?



Rodriguez writes of the violence, “It was the worst moment for Los Angeles. It was also the first moment.” What does he mean?

What words does Rodriguez use to describe the violence in Los Angeles in 1992? Why do you think he writes that “in those first hours, before darkness fell, it seemed like a simple story, a story we had known before—another Detroit, another Harlem, another Watts—a story with a narrative line we knew from memory”? Why does he believe that the story is not as simple as some believed it was? What does he believe that “nobody quite understood in those first hours”?

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Timeline

This timeline provides a summary of events described in *Twilight: Los Angeles*.

1991	March 3	Los Angeles police officers use force in subduing Rodney G. King, an African American. George Holliday tapes the beating on his home video camera and gives it to a local TV station; it is soon seen around the world.
	March 7	King is released after the district attorney's office announces there is not enough evidence to file criminal charges.
	March 15	Four Los Angeles police officers—Sergeant Stacey C. Koon and officers Laurence M. Powell, Timothy E. Wind, and Theodore J. Briseno—are arraigned on felony charges stemming from the King beating.
	March 16	A store security camera shows the fatal shooting of fifteen-year-old Latasha Harlins, an African American, by Soon Ja Du, a Korean American storekeeper.
	March 26	The four police officers charged in the King beating plead not guilty. Soon Ja Du is arraigned on one count of murder.
	May 10	A grand jury decides not to indict any of the 19 officers who were bystanders to the beating. The police department later disciplines ten of them.
	July 23	The State Second District Court of Appeal announces the trial of the four officers will be held out of Los Angeles County.
	September 30	The trial of Soon Ja Du begins.
	November 15	Compton Superior Court Judge Joyce A. Karlin sentences Soon Ja Du to five years probation, 400 hours of community service, and \$500 fine for the shooting death of Latasha Harlins.
November 26	The trial of the officers charged in the King beating is moved from Los Angeles County to Simi Valley in neighboring Ventura County.	
1992	March 4	The trial of the officers charged in the King beating begins. None of the jurors is African American.
	April 29	The jury returns not-guilty verdicts on all charges except one count of excessive force against Officer Powell; a mistrial is declared on that count alone. Violence erupts in Los Angeles. Rioters pull Reginald Denny from his truck and beat him unconscious at the intersection of Florence and Normandie; the incident is captured on video. Los Angeles mayor Tom Bradley declares a local emergency. Governor Pete Wilson calls out the National Guard. Fires break out over 25 blocks in central Los Angeles.

- April 30** Mayor Tom Bradley imposes a curfew, restricts sales of gasoline, and bans the sale of ammunition. The U.S. Justice Department announces it will investigate possible civil rights violations in the beating of Rodney King. There is looting and/or fires are set in many neighborhoods across the city.
- May 1** President George Bush sends federal troops to Los Angeles.
- May 2** Clean-up crews arrive. About 30,000 people march through Koreatown in support of Korean American merchants and call for peace. President Bush declares Los Angeles a disaster area.
- May 3** The *Los Angeles Times* reports 51 deaths; 2,383 injuries; more than 7,000 fire responses, 12,111 arrests; and 3,100 businesses damaged.
- May 4** With troops guarding the streets, Los Angeles residents return to work and school.
- May 8** Federal troops begin to pull out of Los Angeles.
- May 11** The Los Angeles Board of Police Commissioners appoints a commission to study the LAPD's performance during the civil unrest.
- May 12** The L.A. Four, Damian Williams, Antoine Miller, Henry K. Watson, and Gary Williams are arrested for the beating of Reginald Denny.
- October 17** A commission holds leaders of the LAPD responsible for the department's failure to respond quickly to April's civil unrest.

1993

- January 22** Ten of the charges against the L.A. Four are dismissed.
- February 3** The federal civil rights trial against the four police officers begins.
- April 17** Officers Briseno and Wind are acquitted. Officer Powell and Sergeant Koon are found guilty of violating King's civil rights and sentenced to 30 months in prison.
- August 19** The trial of the L.A. Four begins.
- October 18** Damian Williams and Henry Keith Watson are acquitted of many of the charges against them.
- December 7** Damian Williams is sentenced to a maximum of ten years in prison for his attack on Reginald Denny.

Twilight: Los Angeles

The film you are about to see is the result of over 300 interviews conducted by Anna Deavere Smith. She uses the actual words of those men and women to tell the story of the violence that rocked Los Angeles in 1992. Everything she says was actually said. Her performance is divided into parts—much the way a play is divided into acts or a book into chapters. As you watch the film, notice how the mood of the story changes as one section ends and another begins.

SMOKE

"Safe and Sound in Beverly Hills"

Elaine Young, real estate agent

"My Enemy"

Rudy Salas, Sr., sculptor and artist
Angela King, Rodney King's aunt

"Control Holds"

Sgt. Charles Duke, Special Weapons and Tactical Unit, LAPD

"No Justice, No Peace: The Latasha Harlins Story"

Charles Lloyd, attorney for Soon Ja Du
Ginna Rae (a.k.a. Queen Malkah), community activist
Jay Woong Yahng, former liquor store owner

"Indelible Substance"

Jose Morales, clerk/typist

"Your Heads in Shame"

Anonymous male juror in Simi Valley trial

ROCKED

"Big and Dreadful Things"

Henry "Keith" Watson, co-assailant of Reginald Denny
Shelby Coffey III, former editor, *Los Angeles Times*
Katie Miller, bookkeeper and accountant
Mrs. June Park, wife of Korean shooting victim
Katie Miller
Stanley K. Sheinbaum, former president Los Angeles Police Commission
Daryl Gates, former chief of LAPD
Stanley K. Sheinbaum
Federico Sandoval, occupation unknown
Ruben Martinez, author/journalist
Maxine Waters, Congresswoman (D-CA)
Charlton Heston, actor/activist

ROCKED [CONTINUED]

Katie Miller
Mrs. June Park
Shelby Coffey III

"Absorb a Little Guilt"

Talent agent, anonymous Hollywood agency
Elaine Young
Henry "Keith" Watson

MORNING AFTER

"Open Your Eyes"

Elvira Evers, cashier

"The Roar"

Jessye Norman, opera singer
Henry "Keith" Watson

LOSSES

"I Gonna Have a Room"

Reginald Denny, truck driver, victim
Paul Parker, chairman, Free the LA Four Plus Defense Committee
Reginald Denny
Paul Parker

"Prisoner of Hope"

Cornel West, scholar

JUSTICE

"AA Meeting"

Maria, Juror #7, federal trial

"Swallowing the Bitterness"

Mrs. Young-Soon Han, former liquor store owner

TWILIGHT

"Limbo"

Twilight Bey, activist

Responding to *Twilight: Los Angeles*

As you watch *Twilight: Los Angeles*, pay attention to the words of each character. Try not to judge the characters or the story until the film is over. Then use your journal or notebook to:

- record what you remember best about the film. What images or scenes stand out? Which characters are the most memorable? What qualities set those characters apart?
- list what you learned from the film. What surprised you? What did you find upsetting or disturbing? What questions did the film raise?

Discuss your observations with classmates. Was everyone struck by the same images? By the same characters? How do you account for differences?



Anna Deavere Smith appears as herself a few times in the film. What do those moments add to our understanding of why she created *Twilight: Los Angeles*? What is the message of the film? How is that message conveyed? Who is the intended audience?



Filmmakers use color, motion, and sound to draw attention to a person or event. How is music used in the film? What message does it convey? How do the lyrics deepen your understanding of the time? How does the lighting change as the film progresses? What does each change

signal? How is each related to the message of *Twilight: Los Angeles*?



The filmmaker has included many of the sounds and images that people in Los Angeles and the nation saw on TV during the violence. What story do they tell? What do the characters who precede and follow those images add to our understanding of what happened and why? How does each character complicate our understanding of a story that is not as simple as it first appears?



Anna Deavere Smith believes that we can learn a lot about a person “in the very moment that language fails them.” Which characters are shown in moments when “language fails them”? What do those moments reveal? How do those moments help us see the individual beyond stereotypes?



At one point in the film, Smith hosts a dinner for a number of the individuals she interviewed. In small groups, list individuals in the film that you would like to bring together. What questions would you ask them? What would you want them to learn from one another? What would you like them to know about you and your own experiences with injustice, fear, racism, or stereotypes?

PostView

This section adds new voices and perspectives to discussions sparked by the film *Twilight: Los Angeles*. It also explores some of the moral questions raised by the film.

DO VIDEOS “TELL ALL”?

Three videotapes are central to the story told in *Twilight: Los Angeles*.

- On March 3, 1991, George Holliday stood on the balcony of his apartment and videotaped police officers beating Rodney King. The part of his video seen on TV begins with Officer Laurence Powell knocking King to ground with a baton. He and other officers beat King repeatedly until he was taken into custody. An editor at KTLA, the TV station that acquired the video, discovered that Holliday had moved the camera soon after he began taping. As a result, the first 10 seconds of the video were blurry. So the editor removed them along with a three-second segment that precedes those 10 seconds. It shows King charging at Powell. The defense used that segment in both trials to establish a motive for the beatings.
- A store security camera filmed Latasha Harlins, a 15-year-old African American girl, arguing with Soon Ja Du, a Korean American storekeeper over a plastic bottle in the girl’s backpack. As they struggled, the backpack fell to the counter and Harlins hit Du. Du then hurled a chair at Harlins and reached behind the counter for a revolver as Harlins picked up the orange juice container, placed it on the counter and walked away. Du fired a single shot. The bullet struck Harlins in the back of the head. She died instantly.
- Television cameras on news helicopters broadcast live the beating of Reginald Denny. As Denny’s truck entered the intersection at Florence and Normandie, Antoine Miller yanked open the cab as others pulled Denny into the street. Henry Watson held Denny’s head down with his foot, while another man kicked him in the stomach. Yet another man hurled a piece of equipment at Denny’s head and then hit him with a claw hammer. Damian Williams then hurled a slab of concrete that struck Denny on the right temple and knocked him unconscious.

In *Twilight: Los Angeles*, Josie Morales, a witness to the beating of Rodney King, says that she called the prosecutor, and even faxed him a letter because “the video doesn’t show you where those officers went and assaulted Rodney King at the beginning.” The surveillance tape also doesn’t reveal why Soon Ja Du was so frightened that she pulled a revolver on a 15-year-old girl. The previous December, young African Americans robbed her store and assaulted and then threatened to kill her son Joseph. At the time Harlins walked into the store, three of the young men were awaiting trial for the assault. To what

extent do videos “tell all”? What might witnesses like Josie Morales have added to the story? What does knowing the context in which the event took place add to the story?

The Rodney King tape was shown on the national evening news 87 times within a 13-month period. Stills from the tape also appeared in newspapers and magazines. How do you think the images shown on the tape shaped the way people viewed events in Los Angeles in 1992? The way people decided who was a victim? A perpetrator? A bystander?

What part does our identity play in the meanings we attach to what we see?

Charles Lloyd, Soon Ja Du’s lawyer, interprets the surveillance tape that shows the shooting of Latasha Harlins. How does his view of the event differ from the way other people interpreted it? Which interpretation is closest to your own? How do you account for differences in interpretation? What part does our identity play in the meanings we attach to what we see? How does our personal history affect our point of view? Our ethnic identity? What other factors shape the way we understand an event?

“ FIFTY YEARS AGO ”

According to James Baldwin, “history is literally present in all that we do.” The past literally shapes the way Rudy Salas, Sr., views events in Los Angeles.

How do you think a father feels
 Stuff that happened to me
 Fifty years ago happening to my son.

History is also literally present in the way other characters in *Twilight: Los Angeles* view the world. How do you think their personal experiences with the police and with African Americans may have shaped the choices the jurors made in the Simi Valley trial? How do you think history influenced the way African Americans responded to the verdict? How does the past shape the way Soon Ja Du responds to Latasha Harlins? Find other examples of the way history is literally present in the stories told in the film. How does history shape the choices these people make? The way they react to individuals and events?

Journalist David Rieff writes that the expression “That’s history” was born in southern California. He calls it “a phrase that simply means that something—a person, a relationship, a career, even a night out—is now over and never need be recalled again. History was the province of the historians and almost no one else.”¹ What does *Twilight: Los Angeles* suggest about the idea that events like the “zoot-suit riots” or the “Watts riots of 1965” are “now over” and “never need be recalled again”? What is the danger in shrugging off the past?

"NO JUSTICE; NO PEACE"

"No justice; no peace" is a chant heard throughout *Twilight: Los Angeles*. In 1991, Samuel H. Pillsbury, a law professor, reflected on its meaning in the case of Soon Ja Du:

Sometimes we forget how fear drives racism and other prejudices. Some small part of the fear may be justified, but the identification of fear with a group leads to unreasoned hostility. The only check on this process is to consider others as individuals, not group members. Which brings us to the most disturbing aspect of the case: the suspicion of racial bias. Du is an immigrant from Korea; Latasha Harlins was black. Maybe the shooting and its punishment had nothing to do with race, but the case fits a historic pattern of devaluing crimes against black citizens uncomfortably well. Perhaps the best we can say is that justice in this one case was not done.

None of this means that Du is a fundamentally bad or dangerous person. The jury did not pass on her character, only on what she did that March morning. We can understand and sympathize with Du's situation, but we still must take a stand on the shooting. If she had seen Latasha Harlins as a person and not a feared type, Latasha might still be alive.

We sometimes forget that punishment can be respectful. It can be a penance, a way for the offender to remove the taint of wrongdoing through principled sacrifice. Nor does her punishment give the rest of us a claim to moral superiority. Du's offense was one that many, many Angelenos could have committed.

At its best, criminal punishment provides a crude and often brutal way of working out tragic conflicts between people. It generally does not make the world better in any immediate way. It is about defending moral principle—here, the value of human life—by attaching painful consequences to wrongful acts. When we make that connection we find some small satisfaction in the defense of a value and move on. When the connection fails, the hurt of crime remains a deep and open wound.²

What does Pillsbury mean when he says that "fear drives racism and other prejudices"? How did fear drive Soon Ja Du? How does it drive other individuals in *Twilight: Los Angeles*? What does his account suggest about the dangers of viewing others as stereotypes rather than as individuals?

What do you think the judge was trying to accomplish by giving Soon Ja Du a suspended sentence? Should she have gone to prison? Should she have made restitution to the family?

In his last paragraph, Pillsbury tries to explain the connection between a moral principle—valuing human life—and the consequences of an act that violates that principle. When the two connect is justice done? If the connection fails, what remains? How does his explanation explain the anger in the African American community over the sentence? How does it explain why many believed that the violence that shook Los Angeles in 1992 was as much about Harlins as it was about King? How does it explain why Paul Parker insisted that African Americans were not burning down their own neighborhoods but Korean businesses in their neighborhoods?

"A ROAR"

In *Twilight: Los Angeles*, Congresswoman Maxine Waters refers to a riot as the "voice of the unheard." Later in the film, opera singer Jessye Norman reflects on what that cry might sound like.



But I think that if I were
a person
already you know a teenager
sort of a youngster
20 or something
And I felt that I were being heard for the first time
It would not be singing as we know it
It would be a roar.
Oh I think it would be a roar
Oh it would come
Oh it would come from the bottom of my feet
It would be
I really think
It would be like a lion
just roaring
it wouldn't be words
it would just be
like the earth's first utterance.
I really do feel so.

The McCone Commission said of the violence that rocked Los Angeles in 1965, "What happened was an explosion—a formless, quite senseless, all but hopeless violent protest—engaged in by a few but bringing great distress to all." How is the roar Norman describes similar to the explosion the McCone Commission describes? What differences seem most striking?

How do people in Los Angeles or any other community get heard? How can they express their outrage? What happens when voices are silenced and concerns discounted? How can listening lead to understanding?

"BURNING DOWN THEIR OWN NEIGHBORHOODS"

In reflecting on the violence, a talent agent at an anonymous Hollywood agency says in part:

It's so
awful out there
it was so heartbreaking
seeing those
the devastation that went on
and people reduced to burning down their own neighborhoods
burning down our neighborhoods
I could see
But burning down their own
That was more dramatic
To me.

What do you think the agent means? Why does he see burning down one's own neighborhood as different from burning someone else's? How do the unheard get heard in a community? What responsibilities do the media have to report all of the stories in a community? Through what other ways besides violence can we be heard? Journalist Juan Gonzalez writes:

During the week that I spent covering that riot, I was amazed that the older Mexican American neighborhoods like East LA and Echo Park, experienced no problems. A middle-aged Mexican American and Vietnam War veteran, whom I met when he was standing armed guard over the photo store he owned to protect it from looters, explained to me, "A community only riots once. When you realize it takes twenty years to recover, you never want to see that again."³

What does the Mexican American add to our understanding of why people burn down their own neighborhood? Of the consequences of that action?

What is a "mob"? Do people behave differently in large crowds than they do in small groups? Than they do when they are alone? What do people mean when they speak of "mob behavior"?

WHERE ARE THE LEADERS?

Anna Deavere Smith gives voice to ordinary people who are often unheard. She also tells the story from the perspective of such public figures as Police Chief Daryl Gates, Stanley K. Sheinbaum, former president Los Angeles Police Commission, Representative Maxine Waters, scholar Cornel West, actor Charlton Heston, Shelby Coffey III, former editor, *Los Angeles Times*, activist Paul Parker and journalist Ruben Martinez. What roles do prominent

individuals play in a crisis? In this case, how does each seem to define his or her universe of obligation? Who is a part of the circle of individuals and groups toward whom they acknowledge an obligation? Whose injuries do they wish to address? Whose rights do they seek to protect?

How are the roles of public officials like Gates, Waters, and Sheinbaum different from those of prominent citizens like Cornel West and Charlton Heston, or activists like Paul Parker and Ruben Martinez? In what respect are their roles similar? What other leaders would you have liked to have heard? What ordinary citizens would you have liked Anna Deavere Smith to have interviewed? What might they have added to the film?

WHO WAS ON TRIAL IN LOS ANGELES IN 1992?

Throughout *Twilight: Los Angeles*, characters reflect on questions related to justice. James Baldwin once wrote, “If one really wishes to know how justice is administered in a country, one does not question the policemen, the lawyers, the judges, or the protected members of the middle class. One goes to the unprotected—those, precisely, who need the law’s protection most!—and listens to their testimony.” What has Anna Deavere Smith learned by going to the “unprotected” in Los Angeles in 1992? Was justice done? Why did the jurors in the first trial think they were on trial? Who else was on trial?

WHAT PROMPTS SOME TO HELP A STRANGER? WHY DID OTHERS LOOK AWAY?

Reginald Denny is amazed at the four African Americans who saved his life. Elvira Evers marvels at the way her cousin Francis responded after Evers was shot. What prompts someone to help a friend? A stranger? Based on his study of rescuers during the Holocaust, Professor Ervin Staub writes:

Goodness, like evil, often begins in small steps. Heroes evolve; they aren’t born. Very often the rescuers make only a small commitment at the start—to hide someone for a day or two. But once they had taken that step, they began to see themselves differently, as someone who helps. What starts as mere willingness becomes intense involvement.

How does his statement apply to Elvira Evers’ cousin? Do you think she would have done the same for anyone or did she help Evers because they were related, because they were friends? How does the statement apply to the four African Americans who rescued Denny? Why did they become involved? What if others who watched the assault on TV had joined them? Could they have made a difference?

In his autobiography *A Gathering of Heroes*, actor Gregory Alan-Williams, an African American, recalls watching a Japanese American try to drive through the intersection at Florence and Normandie only to face a barrage of bricks

and bottles. In an instant Alan-Williams decided to help the man. He began by looking people in the eye and saying “Come on, ya’ll know this ain’t right.” For a few moments, several people dropped their bottles and backed off. A middle-aged man stepped forward to keep the crowd away while Alan-Williams pulled the injured driver out of the car. As Alan-Williams then led the man away from the mob, a few individuals offered aid—a call to 911, assistance in reaching a side street, a towel to wipe the injured man’s wounds, and even an attempt to hail a passing police car. Several motorists offered a ride. How does Alan-Williams’s story complicate our understanding of what it takes to rescue a single individual? He says that in helping the injured man, he was “reclaiming justice for myself.” What do you think he means?

Research suggests that the responses of bystanders give an event meaning by the kind of attention they pay to it. Who were the bystanders in the film? How did each give meaning to the event?

WHEN DO THEY BECOME ONE OF US?

In reflecting on the looting, bookkeeper Katie Miller says

Now
they talk about the looting looting
in Korea town those weren’t blacks
those weren’t blacks those was Mexicans
in the Korean town.

The talent agent at an anonymous Hollywood agency recalls:

I remember somebody said
Did you hear they’re burning down
the Beverly Center.

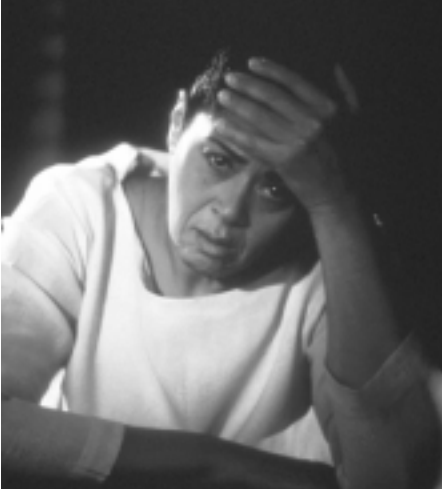
He goes on to say:

It almost didn’t matter who
it’s irrelevant
somebody
it’s not us.

How do other characters in *Twilight: Los Angeles* use the words *we* and *they*? How do stereotypes create distance between *us* and *them*? What stereotypes are imbedded in those pronouns? What does it take to break those stereotypes?

"WHY DO WE HAVE TO BE LEFT OUT?"

In reflecting on the events of 1992, Young-Soon Han, a former liquor store owner, says:



Then a couple months ago
 I really realized that
 Korean immigrants were out from this
 society and we were nothing
 What is our right?
 Is it because we are Korean
 is it because we have no politicians
 is it because we don't
 speak good English
 why
 why do we have to be left out?

How would you answer her questions? How are they similar to the questions that Ruben Martinez asks?

Even though you're working hard,
 Even though, you know, you're raising a family
 and doing all the right things,
 you're still,
 there's still something wrong with you
 You know?
 You're walking just out of step.
 Maybe it's because you speak Spanish.
 Maybe it's cause you have brown skin.
 Maybe it's cause you come from Mexico.
 You know?
 Um
 But
 You're
 You're just not walking right,
 You're just not walking right.

What do their words reveal about the pain of being left out? About the power of stereotypes in shaping identity—our sense of who we are and what we may become? Why does Young-Soon Han find it so difficult to break her own stereotypes and “swallow the bitterness”?

"TO BE A TRUE HUMAN BEING"

Twilight: Los Angeles ends with the words of Twilight Bey, a young activist:

So a lot of times when I've brought up ideas to my homeboys
they say Twilight
that's before your time
that's something you can't do now
when I talked about the truce back in 1988
that was something they considered before its time
yet in 1992
we made it
realistic
so to me it's like I'm stuck in limbo
like the sun is stuck between night and day
in the twilight hours
you know
I'm in an area not many people exist
Night time to me
is like a lack of sun
and I don't affiliate
darkness with anything negative
I affiliate
darkness of what was first
because it was first
and then relative to my complexion
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
and in order for me to be a true human being
I can't forever dwell in darkness
I can't forever dwell in the idea
just identifying with people like me and understanding me and mine
So twilight
is
that time
between day and night
limbo
I call it limbo.

What does it mean to be human? What part does empathy—the ability to place yourself in someone else's shoes—play in Twilight Bey's understanding

of what it means to be human? Empathy is often considered critical in a democracy, because “it is through the imagination that we render others sufficiently like ourselves for them to become subjects of tolerance and respect, if not always affection.” Do you agree? What part does empathy play in uniting a community?

“I’M GONNA HAVE A ROOM”

In reflecting on his experience, Reginald Denny says:

Someday when I
uh
get a house
I’m gonna have one of the rooms
and it’s gonna be
of all the riot stuff
and it won’t be a
blood and guts
memorial
it’s not gonna be a sad
it’s gonna be a happy room.

Paul Parker has a similar dream.

When I finally get my house I’m gonna have just one room set aside.
It’s gonna be my No Justice No Peace room.
Gonna have up on the wall No Justice,
Over here No Peace,
and have all my articles
and clippings and, um,
everything else.
I guess so my son can see,
My children can know what Daddy did.

What do you think would be an appropriate way of remembering the violence that shook Los Angeles in 1992? Should it be a room? A monument? What would you want visitors to remember?

¹ *Los Angeles: Capital of the Third World* by David Rieff. Simon & Schuster, 1991, 61.

² “Should Fear Know No Limits?” by Samuel Pillsbury. *The Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 22, 1991.

³ *Harvest of Empire* by Juan Gonzalez. Penguin Books, 2000, 144.



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