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Correction Appended

**SECTION:** Section E; Page 3; Column 1; The Arts/Cultural Desk

**LENGTH:** 598 words

**HEADLINE:** FILM REVIEW;

The Magic of the Stage Meets Reality in the Clips

**BYLINE:** By **DAVE KEHR**

**BODY:**

With "**Twilight: Los Angeles**," the documentary and video maker Marc Levin has transformed Anna Deavere Smith's much-honored performance piece "**Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992**" into something both more and less than itself.

More in that Mr. Levin has introduced documentary clips of the 1992 Los Angeles civic disturbances that are the subject of Ms. Smith's play, and less in that the added images diminish the impact of Ms. Smith's extraordinary skills as an actor.

In the stage piece, Ms. Smith shifts seamlessly among dozens of characters, moving from the bored complacency of a Beverly Hills real estate agent to the explosive syntax and hammering gestures of a South-Central teenager. Drawing her text from hundreds of interviews she conducted after the videotaped police beating of Rodney G. King in 1991, Ms. Smith creates a vocal symphony of amazing range and power, a chorus of widely different voices placed in precise and revealing counterpoint.

It is an extraordinary piece of journalism and a virtuoso display of technique, as if Ms. Smith had turned her whole body into a kind of recording machine, able to reproduce an encounter and its smallest nuances with breathtaking fidelity. At one moment Ms. Smith is the bitter widow of a Korean grocer killed in the looting after the acquittal of the police officers in the case; at another she is the Los

Angeles police chief, Daryl F. Gates, lamely explaining why he left police headquarters to attend a fund-raising party on the first night of disturbances; at another she is Charlton Heston, grinning as he remembers his liberal friends calling him in the hope of borrowing a spare shotgun.

It seems strangely deflating, then, when the real Mr. Gates appears in a news clip or turns up for a conversation with Ms. Smith and a community activist seven years later. At these moments, the smeary video images seem much less evocative and much less precise than Ms. Smith's full-bodied impersonations.

"Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992," relies heavily on cinematic montage techniques: Ms. Smith's transitions between characters are unmarked and perfectly fluid, as if she were simply cutting from one close-up to another. On film, Mr. Levin, whose "Slam" was a sensation on the festival circuit in 1998, has decided to identify the shifting characters with subtitles, both to underline the moments of transition and to provide background information. The Rodney King video is played repeatedly, and there is a wide selection of news clippings of jubilant looters and smoldering buildings.

These intrusions end up making the movie, which opens today at the Film Forum, seem less cinematic than the stage production. Mr. Levin has clearly been faced with a dilemma: to simply record Ms. Smith's stage work in the manner of a concert film like "Kings of Comedy" would leave too much of the material out of context and unexplained. But to make a straight documentary on the 1992 disturbances would be to obliterate Ms. Smith's amazing artistry.

The resulting compromise does not produce a perfect film, but it is a fine record of a classic production and an important reminder of an event that has not stopped echoing in American culture.

## TWILIGHT Los Angeles

Directed by Marc Levin; conceived, written and performed by Anna Deavere Smith; director of photography, Maryse Alberti; edited by Robert Eisenhardt; music by Camara Kambon; produced by Ezra

Swerdlow and Ms. Smith; released by Offline Releasing. At the Film Forum, 209 West Houston Street, South Village. Running time: 85 minutes. This film is not rated.

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**CORRECTION-DATE:** September 28, 2000, Thursday

**CORRECTION:**

Because of a production error, the last two words of a film review yesterday about Anna Deavere Smith's "Twilight: Los Angeles" were omitted. The concluding paragraph should have read: "The resulting compromise does not produce a perfect film, but it is a fine record of a classic production and an important reminder of an event that has not stopped echoing in American culture."

**GRAPHIC:** Photo: Anna Deavere Smith in the film "Twilight: Los Angeles." (Adger W. Cowans)

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