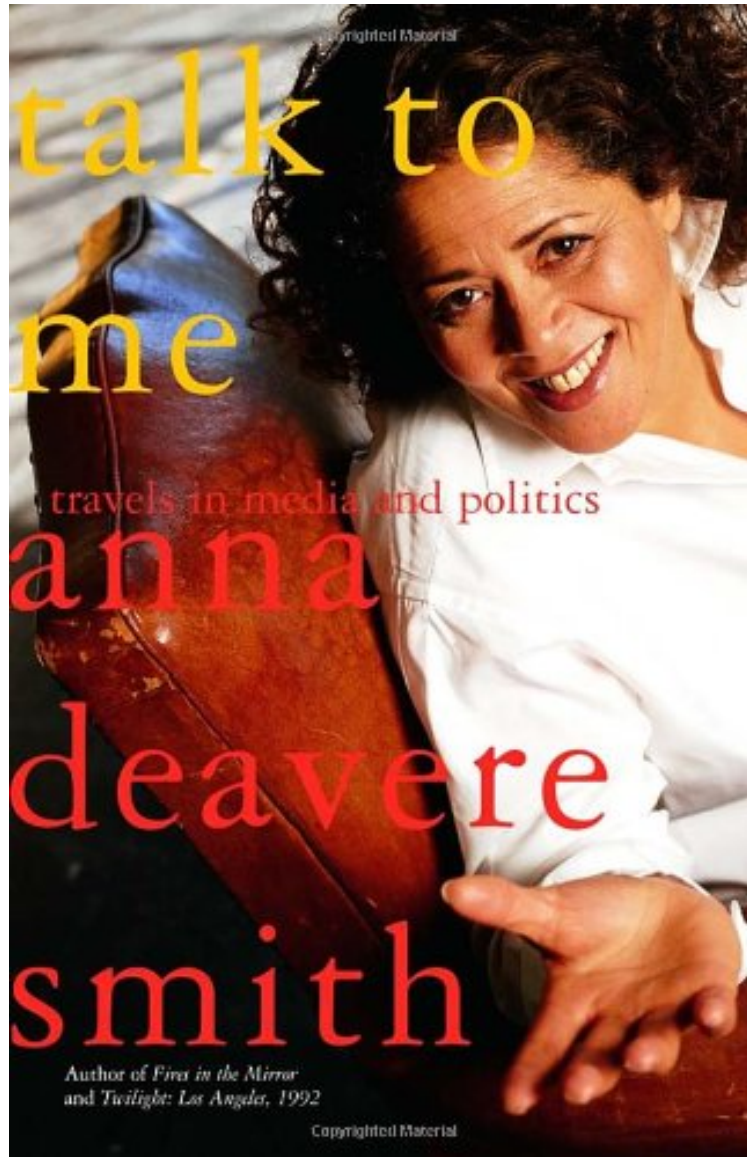


Talk to Me: Travels in Media and Politics

Anna Deavere Smith

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Anna Deavere Smith : Talk to Me: Travels in Media and Politics before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Talk to Me: Travels in Media and Politics:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Beyond my expectationsBy sugarmag424This autobiographical book by the accomplished actor,play wright and scholar exceeded my expectations. I expected "how I did things well" and got a thoughtful discourse on the importance of actively listening to another person. Ms. Deveare Smith is

generous with her method of designing questions which have allowed her to produce her award-winning plays. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Review of *Talk to Me: Listening Between the Lines* By Andrew Whalan
Anna Deavere Smith's *Listening Between the Lines* is an inspiring story of her career and her journey. It's a story of how curiosity and exploration unlocks the real people through listening to them. 13 of 19 people found the following review helpful. *Empty Promises, Wasted Words* By D. A. Giacalone
Professor Anna Deavere Smith promises a lot to the readers of "Talk to Me." She delivers very little. Her insights and conclusions are one-liners that could barely fill a page of print -- there is no amplification, no explanation, no theory applied or proposed for application elsewhere. The book is mostly a disjointed journal, interrupted by disjointed quotations and commentaries, and given ersatz gravitas through strained historical analogies, borrowed expertise, and insider quips. Don't believe the liner notes. If you are looking for insights about the American presidency, or "the relationship of the press to the presidency," look elsewhere. If you hoped to better understand the relationship of the arts to American culture, or the struggles of minorities and women to America's identity crisis, you will be disappointed. The book's subtitle is "Listening Between the Lines," but the author gives us no clue how to do that, beyond a confusing suggestion to look for "trochees." If "Talk to Me" has any useful substance, it must also be "between the lines," because it surely is not in the text. In her theater performances, Ms. Smith may very well help the audience find the soul and character of America through its words. But, this book shows how poorly the transcribed word [especially mere snippets from lengthy conversations] can capture a person's spirit, much less an institution's or a profession's. The combination of talent and magic and connection that makes Ms. Smith's techniques work in the theater simply cannot be transferred to the printed page -- at least, has not been in this book. I can't imagine who might find this book worth the time and effort. Any person well-read in race relationships and civil rights, political science, acting, or sociology, will find little fresh food for thought, and certainly nothing to chew on. And, those with little background in these disciplines will find a confusing shopping cart of ingredients, but no finished meal nor recipe for creating one. I did learn a few things from "Talk to Me": (beyond Ms. Smith's travel schedule and enviable list of accomplishments and friends): (1) interesting people don't always write interesting books; (2) even MacArthur Fellows have a hard time transferring talent from one medium to another; and (3) even Charlie Rose can tout a very mediocre book. I'd love to have Anna Deavere Smith at a dinner party, but I can't recommend her book to any one serious about the topics she purports to cover and enlighten or on a tight schedule.

Anna Devere Smith's award-winning one-woman shows were borne of her uniquely brilliant ability to listen. In *Talk to Me* she applies her rare talent to the language of political power in America. Believing that character and language are inextricably bound, Smith sets out to discern the essence of America by listening to its people and trying to capture its politics. To that end she travels to some of America's most conspicuous places, like the presidential conventions of 1996, and some of its darkest corners, like a women's prison in Maryland. And along the way she interviews everyone from janitors to murderers to Bill Clinton himself. Memoir, social commentary, meditation on language, this book is as vastly ambitious as it is compellingly unique.

.com Anna Deavere Smith, an actress and playwright in a category all her own, travels America in pursuit of authentic language, the kind that reveals the truth of a person, not just information. Once she finds that "personal music," she becomes the person through their verbal tics and idiosyncrasies, showcasing them in her critically acclaimed one-woman plays. In 1995, Smith took her tape recorder to Washington, D.C., to capture the American presidency. But, she writes, "I knew that I knew nothing about the president, or any public figure for that matter, that the press didn't tell me. I would have to look at the press too." Over the course of five years, she interviewed Washington insiders (George Stephanopoulos, Marlin Fitzwater, David Kendall), members of the press (Ben Bradlee, Mike Wallace, Mike Isikoff), cultural critics (Ken Burns, Studs Terkel), and finally President Clinton himself. The book is a hybrid of transcripts of these interviews, vignettes of capitol politics, and ruminations on language, race relations, and inclusion; the parallel between the theatre and politics; and the potential for genuine human communication between politicians and the people. "The language of Washington is in disrepair," Smith writes, "a verbal flat line," and though politicians have tried to learn from actors, they have failed so fully they can no longer connect with their audiences. The press comes in for an even stronger critique as a group that honors truth, but is busy looking for lies and creating a highly wired cocoon. The book's best and most startling moments are when her subjects "bust out" and surprise us, as when Clinton's former press secretary Mike McCurry says: And we, we came very close in the last week to a point for, where I thought I was going to get asked about what kind of erections the president has. I mean quite seriously.... So it's a, it's weird. It's kind of this merging of our popular culture and tabloid mentality and the evening shows ... and it's kind of this morphing of what we consider, you know, civil discourse and ah so it's it's a troubling time. While Smith tends to meander, interested perhaps in following her own authentic speech, she raises necessary questions and offers even more intriguing conclusions: there will never be real conversation between Washington and the rest of the nation until there's desegregation of the most insular community around--the capitol clique. --Lesley Reed
From Publishers Weekly
Catapulted to national prominence for her virtuosic one-woman show, *Twilight*, Los Angeles: 1992,

actress and playwright Smith struck a nerve impersonating (based on her own interviews) scores of participants and bystanders in the 1992 riot following the acquittal of the police officers accused of beating Rodney King. Here, she weighs in with fertile ruminations on her philosophy of acting, observations on the daily political theater in Washington, D.C., and outtakes from the interviews she conducted for *House Arrest*, the most recent installment in her ongoing series of plays "in search of the American character." Soon after she decided in 1995 to take the presidency as her next subject, she realized, "I knew nothing about the president... that the press didn't tell me." To get the whole story, Smith interviewed President Clinton and former presidents Bush and Carter, as well as high-ranking political insiders (including former press secretary Mike McCurry and labor secretary Alexis Herman), members of the press (Peggy Noonan, Ben Bradley) and assorted cultural commentators (filmmaker Ken Burns, scholar Judith Butler). The resulting performances in Los Angeles and New York faced mixed reviews; while provocative, the play was criticized for lacking the dramatic coherence of her previous work (it is currently in hiatus). Composed of a series of brief vignettes punctuated with edgy verbatim monologues by various Washington insiders, the book shows signs of similar organizing struggles. Though prone to tangents, Smith is at her most incisive when probing the abiding parallels between the theater and politics. Her fans will appreciate this behind-the-scenes view of her signature technique and her unique perspective on the intersection of art and politics. Agent, Gloria Loomis. (Oct.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Library Journal* Smith, an unusual combination of actor and journalist, puts together monologs taken directly from her interviews and performs them. Her project, "On the Road: A Search for American Character," has been running since 1980. Here is an account of her recent excursion to Washington. Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.